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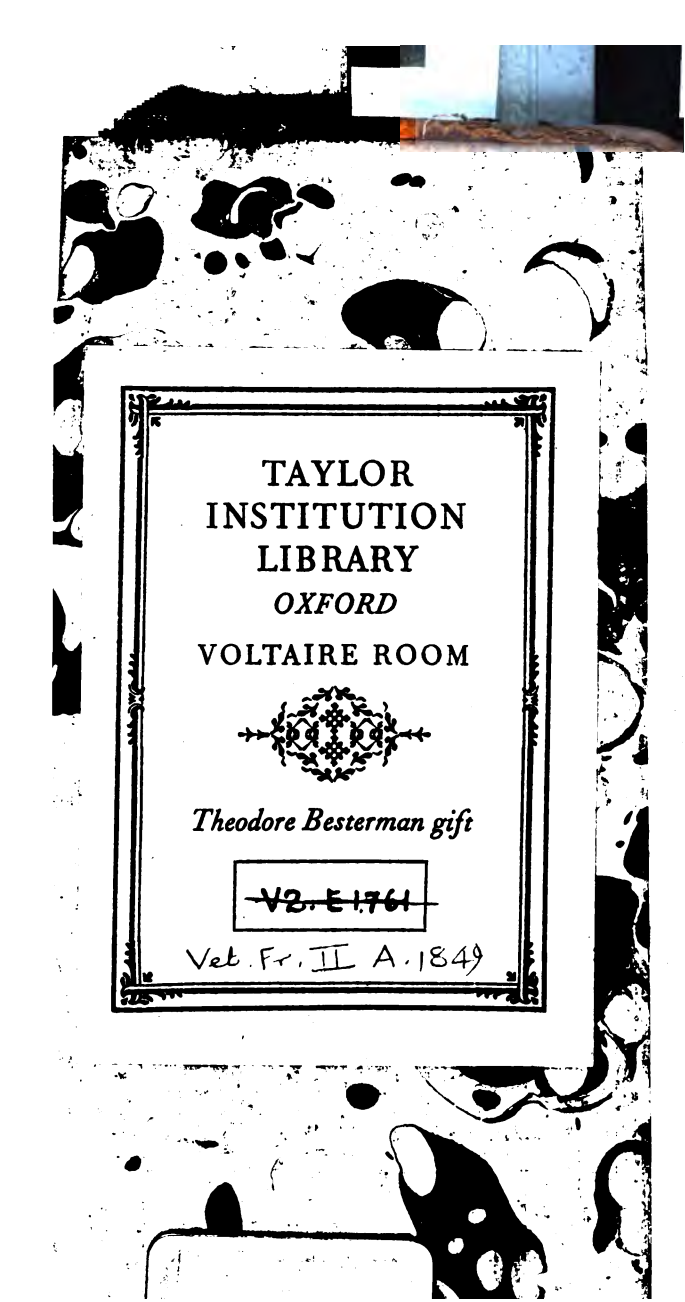
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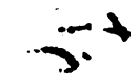

CRITICAL ESSAYS

ON

DRAMATIC POETRY.

B Berry

Monſieur de VOLTAIRE.

Et vos, O Lauri, carpam, et te, proxima Myrte,
Sic poſitae quoniam ſuaves miſcetis odores. VIRGIL.

GLASGOW,
Printed for ROBERT URIE.
MDCCLXI.

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CRITICAL ESSAYS.

ESSAY on TRAGEDY.*

Addreſſed to Henry St. John, Lord Viſcount Bolingbroke.

THOUGH I dedicate to an Engliſhman a play repreſented at Paris, it is not, my lord, that there are wanting in France men of great merit, and excellent judges, to whom I might have paid that homage. But, you know, the tragedy of Brutus † was begun in England: you remember when I was retired to Wandſworth at my good friend, Sir Everard Falkener's, that worthy and virtuous patriot, I applied myſelf to write, in Engliſh proſe, the firſt act of this play, pretty much in the ſame manner as it now ſtands in

* Prefixed to his Tragedy of Brutus.

† There is an Engliſh Brutus by an author named Lee; but it is a performance unknown, and never repreſented in London. Voltaire.

the French verſe. I ſpoke to you of it ſometimes, and we were both ſurprized that no Engliſh writer had handled this ſubject, which is ſo extremely well adapted to your theatre. You emboldened me to continue a ſubject ſo ſuſceptible of great ſentiments.

Give me leave then, my lord, to offer you Brutus, though wrote in a foreign tongue, *docte ſermones, utriſque linguæ*, to you who could give me inſtructions in the French as well as in the Engliſh; to you, who, at leaſt, might teach me to add to my native language that energy and force which a noble liberty of thinking inſpires: for the vigorous ſentiments of the ſoul paſs always to the tongue; a ſtrength of mind always commands a ſtrength of expreſſion. I muſt own that at my return from England, where I ſpent a couple of years in a continual ſtudy of your language, I found myſelf at a loſs, when I attempted to write a French tragedy. I was almoſt accuſtomed to think in Engliſh. I perceived that the French terms did not offer themſelves to my imagination in the ſame abundance they formerly did. It was a rivulet whoſe ſource had been diverted another way: both time and pains were neceſſary to bring it back to its former channel. I became ſenſible that, to ſucceed in an art, we muſt cultivate it our whole life.

What terrified me moſt, was the great ſtrictneſs of our poetry and the ſlavery of rhime. I regretted that liberty you poſſeſs of writing your tragedies in blank verſe, of lengthening;

or of ſhortening almoſt all your words at pleaſure, of throwing one line into another, and of creating new terms at will, which are always adopted by the nation when their neceſſity is obvious, their ſenſe eaſily underſtood, and their ſound harmonious *. An Engliſh poet, I uſed to ſay, is a free man, who ſubjects his language to his genius; the Frenchman is a conſtant ſlave to rhime, often obliged to write four verſes to convey a thought, which in Engliſh can be expreſſed in one. An Engliſhman ſays what he *will* ſay, but a Frenchman, only what he *can*. The one runs on boldly in a vaſt career; the other, loaded with chains, ſteps on ſlowly in a ſlippery narrow path.

Notwithſtanding theſe reflections and complaints, we ſhall never be able to free ourſelves from the yoke of rhime. It is eſſential to French poetry. Our language does not admit of tranſpoſitions, our verſe does not allow of lines running into each other, our ſyllables are incapable of cauſing any ſenſible harmony by long or ſhort

* It muſt be remarked that in France the admittance of new words finds much more difficulty than the naturalization of a foreign ſubject. One remarkable inſtance I remember, which is the word *Proſateur*, proſe-writer. The famous Menage, who wrote ſo much and ſo well on the French language, and of its origin, was very fond of *Proſateur*, and laboured forty years, it is ſaid, among his brethren of the French academy to introduce this really uſeful term; but without ſucceſs. The writers of that nation are ſince grown a little leſs difficult, and among others, this word has gained admittance.

meaſures. Our hemiſtics * and a ſtated number of feet are not alone ſufficient to diſtinguiſh proſe from verſe, and therefore the addition of rhime is abſolutely neceſſary in French poetry.

Beſides, ſo many great writers, who have made uſe of rhime, ſuch as the Corneilles, Racines, and Boileaus, have ſo accuſtomed our ears to that kind of harmony, that we can endure no other; and I muſt repeat it, whoever attempts to get rid of a burden which was borne by the great Corneille, will be, with juſtice, looked upon, not as an enterprizing genius, who opens out to himſelf a new road, but as a very weak man unable to ſupport himſef in the antient track.

It has been attempted to give us tragedies in proſe; but I do not ſuppoſe that this undertaking will ever ſucceed. They who have *more* will not be eaſily ſatisfied with *leſs*. He that diminiſhes the public's pleaſure, will be always ill received by them. If, among the pictures of Rubens or of Paul Veroneſe, any body placed his own deſigns in crayon, would he not be in the wrong to put himſelf in competition with theſe painters? We are accuſtomed at feaſts to ſing and dance; would it be enough merely to walk and ſpeak, becauſe it would be eaſier and more natural?

It is probable that *verſe* will be *every where* found neceſſary in the tragic ſcene, and *rhime*

* In French verſe, there is, generally, a pauſe about the middle of every line, which is called *Céſure*, and each half-line is diſtinct from the other, and called *Hémiſtiche*.

always in *our's*. It is even to this conſtraint of rhime, and to the extreme ſeverity of our verſification, that we are indebted for the excellent performances we poſſeſs in our language.

We inſiſt that rhime ſhould not be at the expence of thought; it muſt be neither trivial nor far fetched. We require the ſame purity and exactneſs in our poetry as in our proſe. We do not ſuffer the leaſt licenſe. An author muſt never diſcontinue to wear his chains, and yet he muſt always appear as if free from them. We acknowlege for poets, only ſuch as have fulfilled all theſe conditions.

On this account it is eaſier to make an hundred verſes in any other languages than four in French. The example of our abbe Regnier Deſmarais of the French academy, and of the academy della cruſca, is an evident proof of this aſſertion. He tranſlated Anacreon into Italian verſe, with ſucceſs; and yet his French poetry, excepting a few ſtanzas, is extremely indifferent. Our Menage was juſt in the ſame caſe. How many of our ingenious countrymen have wrote excellent latin verſe; whoſe French poetry is not even tolerable!

I know how many diſputes I have had about our verſification, in England, and the reproaches made me by the learned biſhop of Rocheſter * on this puerile conſtraint, which, he pretends, we impoſe on ourſelves without any colour of neceſſity. But be aſſured, my lord, that the more a foreigner is acquainted with our lan-

* Dr. Atterbury.

guage, the more he will be reconciled to the very rhime which ſtartles him ſo much in the beginning. It is not only neceſſary to our tragedies, but it embelliſhes even our comedies. A happy thought is eaſier remembered in verſe than in proſe. Deſcriptions of human life are always more ſtriking when poetically expreſſed; and by verſe, in French, we muſt always neceſſarily underſtand rhime; in ſhort, we have ſome comedies in proſe, of the celebrated Moliere, that we have been obliged to turn into verſe; and now they are never acted but in their new dreſs.

As I could not venture blank verſe on the French ſtage, according to the cuſtom of Italy and England, I would fain, at leaſt, introduce ſome other beauties on our ſcene from yours. You muſt own, the Engliſh theatre is very imperfect; I have heard you ſay, my lord, that you had not *one* good tragedy; but for recompence, you have, in theſe monſtrous compoſitions, ſcenes truly admirable. Almoſt all the tragic authors of your nation are defective in that elegance, that exactneſs, that decency of action and ſtile, and all the delicate *fineſſes* of the art which have eſtabliſhed the reputation of the French theatre, ſince the great Corneille. But your moſt irregular plays have one great merit, which is that of action.

We have tragedies in France that are eſteemed, which are converſations, rather than a repreſentation of facts. An Italian author wrote to me in the following manner, in a letter on the theatres: "A critic on our Paſtor-Fido "ſaid that this work was a collection of excel-

" lent madrigals: I belive, were he now alive, " he would ſay of the French tragedies, that " they are a collection of fine elegies and ſub- " lime epithalamiums."

I am afraid this Italian is in the right. Our exceſſive delicacy obliges us often, to recite what ſhould be repreſented. We are loth to venture a new ſpectacle before a people ſo inclined to turn every thing into ridicule that is not cuſtomary.

The place where plays are acted, and the abuſes that have crept in by degrees, are another cauſe of that heavineſs which is found in ſome of our compoſitions. The benches on the ſtage, for the uſe of ſpectators, ſtreighten the ſcene, and render almoſt every action imperfect *. This defect alſo hinders decorations, ſo much recommended by the antients, from being ever rightly adapted to the piece; and the actors cannot paſs from one apartment to another before the ſpectators, as the Greeks and Romans uſed to do, in order to preſerve, at the ſame time, unity of place and probability.

How could we dare, for example, to intro-

* The tranſlator is informed that this great abuſe was corrected in the theatre of Paris in the year 1759, through the means and at the expence of the count de Lauragais, whom it coſt about a thouſand pounds ſterling, for the different changes and reparations that this reformation required. This young nobleman is member of the royal academy of ſciences of Paris; he is remarkable for his attachment in general to every branch of ſcience and literature, but is particularly known as a chemiſt and as a poet.

duce on our theatre, the ghoſt of Pompey, of Brutus's genius, in the midſt of a parcel of young fellows, who never conſider the moſt ſerious matters but as an occaſion of manifeſting their wit in the cracking of a joke? How could we have attempted, among ſuch, upon the ſtage, the bloody corpſe of Marcus before his father Cato? who ſays,

Welcome, my ſon! here lay him down, my friends,
Full in my ſight, that I may view at leiſure
The bloody coarſe, and count thoſe glorious wounds.
How beautiful is death, when earn'd by virtue!
Who would not be that youth? what pity is it
That we can die but once to ſerve our country!
Alas, my friends!
Why mourn you thus! let not a private loſs
Afflict your hearts. 'Tis Rome requires our tears.
The miſtreſs of the world, the ſeat of empire,
The nurſe of heroes, the delight of gods,
That humbled the proud tyrants of the earth,
And ſet the nations free, Rome is no more.
O liberty! O virtue! O my country!

This is what the late Mr. Addiſon did not dread to repreſent to the Engliſh ſtage, and what has been tranſlated into Italian, and acted in ſeveral towns of Italy. And yet if *we* ſhould venture ſuch a ſpectacle at Paris, do not you think the pit would be ſhocked, and the ladies ſhudder?

You cannot imagine how far they puſh this ſort of delicacy. The author of our tragedy of Manlius took his ſubject from Mr. Otway's Ve-

nice Preſerved; and each, from the hiſtory of the conſpiracy of the marquiſs de Bedmar, wrote by the abbe de St. Real; and give me leave to add, that this piece of hiſtory, equal perhaps to Salluſt, is much ſuperior either to your Otway or to our Manlius.

In the firſt place, you will take notice of the prejudice which obliged our French poet to diſguiſe under Roman names a known fact, which the Engliſh author naturally relates under the real ones. It was not thought ridiculous on the theatre of London, that a Spaniſh ambaſſador ſhould be called Bedmar, and that conſpirators ſhould be named Jaffier, Pierre, and Eliot. That alone in France would have been ſufficient to damn the play. But Otway goes ſtill further; he is not afraid of aſſembling the conſpirators. Renaud receives their oaths and promiſes, aſſigns to each his particular poſt, fixes the hour of maſſacre, and, every now and then, caſts unquiet and ſuſpicious looks on Jaffier, whom he miſtruſts. He makes them this pathetic ſpeech, tranſlated word for word from the abbe de St. Real;

Never did ſo profound repoſe fore-run
Calamity ſo great; nay, our good fortune
Has blinded the moſt piercing of mankind,
Strengthen'd the fearfuleſt, charm'd the moſt reſpect-
Confounded the moſt ſubtile: for we live, [ful,
We live, my friends, and quickly ſhall our life
Prove fatal to theſe tyrants:

What has the French writer done in this caſe? he dares not introduce ſuch a number of perſonages on the ſcene, and is therefore obliged to make Renaud, under the name of Rutilus, repeat a ſmall part of this ſpeech which, he ſays, he had before made to the conſpirators. You conceive from this very account, how much ſuperior the Engliſh drama muſt be to the French, though Otway's play ſhould be, in other reſpects, monſtrous.

With how much pleaſure I ſaw in London your tragedy of Julius Caeſar, which has been the delight of your nation for a century and a half paſt! I do not indeed pretend to approve the barbarous irregularities with which it abounds. It is only ſurprizing that there are not ſtill greater defects in a work, wrote in an age of ignorance, by a man who did not even underſtand Latin, and whoſe only maſter was his genius *.

* This notion hath been abundantly refuted. The preſent biſhop of Glouceſter has ſtrongly contended for Shakeſpear's learning, and has produced many imitations and parallel paſſages with antient authors.

I am inclined, ſays Mr. Pope, to think this opinion proceeded originally from the zeal of the partizans of our author and Ben Johnſon; as they endeavoured to exalt the one at the expence of the other. It is ever the nature of parties to be in extremes; and nothing is ſo probable, as that becauſe Ben Johnſon had much the moſt learning, it was ſaid on the one hand, that Shakeſpear had none at all; and becauſe Shakeſpear had much the moſt wit and fancy, it was retorted on the other, that Johnſon wanted both. Pref. to Mr. Pope's Edit. of Shakeſpear.

But amidſt ſo many groſs faults, with what ecſtacy did I ſee Brutus ſtill holding the poynard ſtained with the blood of Caeſar! and having aſſembled the Roman people, addreſſing himſelf to them in the following manner:

" Romans, countrymen, and friends! hear for my cauſe; and be ſilent, that you may hear. Believe me for mine honour, and have reſpect to mine honour, that you may believe. Cenſure me in your wiſdom, and awake your ſenſes that you may the better judge. If there be any in this aſſembly, any dear friend of Caeſar's, to him I ſay, that Brutus's love to Caeſar was no leſs than his. If then that friend demand, why Brutus roſe againſt Caeſar, this is my anſwer: not that I loved Caeſar leſs, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caeſar were living, and die all ſlaves; than that Caeſar were dead, to live all freemen? As Caeſar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him; but as he was ambitious, I ſlew him. There are tears for his love, joy for his fortune, honour for his valour, and death for his ambition. Who is here ſo baſe, that would be a bondman? If any, ſpeak; for him have I offended. Who is here ſo rude, that would not be a Roman? If any, ſpeak; for him have I offended. Who is here ſo vile, that will not love his country? If any, ſpeak; for him have I offended. ——— I pauſe for a reply. ———

Romans.

None, Brutus, none.

Brutus.

Then none have I offended——I have done no more to Caeſar than you ſhall do to Brutus. The queſtion of his death is enrolled in the capitol; his glory not extenuated, wherein he was worthy; nor his offences enforced, for which he ſuffered death.——Here comes his body, mourned by Mark Antony: who, though he had no hand in his death, ſhall receive the benefit of his dying, a place in the common-wealth; as which of you ſhall not? with this I depart, that as I ſlew my beſt lover for the good of Rome, I have the ſame dagger for myſelf, when it ſhall pleaſe my country to need my death.

Romans.

Live, Brutus, live!"

After this ſcene, Mark Antony comes to raiſe the compaſſion of the very Romans, in whom Brutus had juſt inſpired all his ſternneſs and inhumanity. Antony, by an artful oration, brings back inſenſibly theſe proud minds; and when they are ſoftened into pity, then he diſcovers to them the corps of Caeſar; and by a diſplay of the moſt pathetic expreſſions, and moſt moving complaints, he ſtirs them up to mutiny and revenge.

Perhaps the French would not ſuffer upon the ſtage a chorus compoſed of Roman plebeians and artizans: or the bloody corps of Caeſar expoſed to the eyes of the multitude; and, that multitude provoked to revenge from the roſtrum. It is cuſtom alone, the governor of the world, that can change the taſte of nations, and turn

into entertainment what was before the object of their antipathy.

The Greeks have hazarded ſpectacles which would not be leſs diſagreeable to us. Hypolitus, ſhattered by his fall, comes on the ſtage to count his wounds, and to utter doleful cries. Philoctetus falls into his melancholy fits, and blackiſh blood guſhes from his ſores. Oedipus, after pulling out his eyes, enters, yet bloody, on the ſtage, inveighing againſt gods and men. The moans of Clitemneſtra are heard by the ſpectators whilſt her own ſon is murdering her, and her daughter Electra encouraging him from the ſtage, and ſaying, "ſtrike, do not ſpare her; "ſhe did not ſpare our father." Prometheus is bound to the rocks with nails which are drove into his body and limbs. The furies anſwer the bloody ghoſt of Clitemneſtra with howling and confuſed noiſe. Several Greek tragedies, in a word, are full of this kind of terror puſhed to the greateſt exceſs.

I am convinced, the tragic writers of Greece, in other reſpects, ſuperior to the Engliſh, have miſtook horror for terror, and what is really loathſome and incredible, for the tragical and marvellous. The art was in its infancy at Athens in the time of Æſchylus, as it was in London in Shakeſpear's time; but among the glaring faults of the Grecian poets, and, even of yours, we find a true pathos, and many extraordinary beauties; and if ſome Frenchmen, who are acquainted with foreign manners, only by tranſlators or by hear-ſay, condemn them with-

out reſtriction; they may be compared, methinks, to thoſe blind men who inſiſt, that the roſe cannot have lively colours, becauſe they feel the thorns, as they grope along

But as the Greeks, and eſpecially the Engliſh, have paſſed the bounds of decency, and given ſpectacles which are really horrible, when they only meant them to be terrible; we Frenchmen on the other hand, as backward as you have been bold, ſtopt too ſoon for fear of going too far, and ſome times do not arrive at the tragic point, leſt we ſhould paſs its limits.

I am far from propoſing that the ſtage ſhould become a ſcene of ſlaughter and deſtruction, as it is in Shakeſpear and in his ſucceſſors; who, not being poſſeſſed of his genius, have only imitated his faults; but I dare aſſert, that there are ſituations which now appear diſagreeable and horrible to the French, which, if they were well conducted, and artfully repreſented, and, eſpecially, if ſoftened by the charms of fine poetry, would create a kind of pleaſure, of which, we have not, at preſent, the leaſt conception.

* Il n'eſt point de ſerpent ni de monſtre odieux.
Qui par l'art imité ne puiſſe plaire aux yeux.

Boileau.

* The moſt hideous monſters, when nicely imitated by art, may be made pleaſing to the eye.

Monſieur de Voltaire, in moſt of the paſſages which he quotes from Engliſh poets, tranſlates them into proſe. If ſuch a poetic genius did not think fit to tranſlate into verſe what was in verſe in the original; how much more juſtifiable and proper muſt

I ſhould be glad to know, at leaſt, why it is allowed to theatrical heroes and heroines to kill themſelves, and, at the ſame time, that it is prohibited, they ſhould kill others? Is the ſcene leſs imbrued with blood when Athalia ſtabs herſelf for her lover, than it would be by Caeſar's murder? and if the appearance of the ſlain ſon of Cato on the ſtage before his father's eyes, be the occaſion of an admirable ſpeech from this old Roman; if it has been applauded in England and in Italy by people who are the greateſt partizans to French decency; if the moſt delicate of the fair ſex have not been offended at it, why ſhould not Frenchmen accuſtom themſelves to it? Is not nature the ſame through all mankind?

All theſe rules, not to imbrue the ſtage with blood, not to introduce upon it above three perſons diſcourſing at a time, might meet with ſome exceptions among us, as they did among the Greeks; laws of decency, for the moſt part ſomewhat arbitrary, are not like the fundamental laws of the theatre, which are the three unities. It would ſhew a want of talents and fertility to extend an action beyond the limited time and place. Aſk a man, who has hurried together too many events in the ſame play, the reaſon of this conduct? If he is ſincere, he will tell you, he wanted genius to fill his piece with a ſingle fact, and if he employs two days and takes in two towns for the ſcene

it be in the preſent *proſaic* tranſlation, to do the ſame!

of action, be assured, it is because he had not the address to confine it to the space of three hours, and within the limits of a palace, as probability required it.

It is quite different with him who hazards a dreadful spectacle on the stage; he does not mean to go beyond the probable; and this boldness, far from supposing a want of parts in the author, requires, on the contrary, a great genius to render, by his poetry, that action truly great, which without sublimity of expression, would appear heinous and loathsome.

This is what our great Corneille once dared attempt in his Rodogune. He introduces a mother, who, in presence of her courtiers, and an ambassador, wants to poison her son and her daughter-in-law, after having killed another son with her own hands; she offers them the empoisoned draught, and, on their refusal and suspicion, she takes it herself, and dies of the poison she had destined for others.

Such terrible strokes must be practised with caution; and it does not become every body to make use of them. These innovations require great circumspection and a masterly execution. The English themselves allow, for example, that Shakespear is the only poet among them, who has been able to make ghosts appear, and speak with any success.

Within that circle none durst move but he.
Dryden.

The more majestic or awful a theatrical acti-

on, the more inſipid a frequent repetition; as the account of battles, than which, nothing can be more terrible, becomes at laſt cold and tireſome, through a conſtant repetition of them in hiſtory.

The only play in which Racine has introduced any ſpectacle is in Athalia, his maſter-piece. An infant appears on the throne, his nurſe ſtands by him, and he is ſurrounded by prieſts; a queen gives orders to her ſoldiers to put this child to death, and armed Levites run to his defence. All this action is pathetic, but without the ſublimity of ſtile and expreſſion, it would have been puerile and ſilly.

The more we aim at ſtriking the eye with pomp and ſtate, the greater neceſſity we are under of ſupporting it with elevated thoughts and ſentiments. Otherwiſe the author is a decorator, not a tragic poet. About thirty years ago a tragedy called Montezuma was acted in Paris: the ſcene opened by a new ſpectacle: a palace was repreſented of a magnificent but barbarous ſtructure; Montezuma appeared in a very ſingular dreſs; arrow-armed ſlaves were placed at the bottom of the ſtage; eight grandees of the court were, near his majeſty, proſtrate on the ground; Montezuma begins the play by ſaying to his courtiers:

Ariſe, your emperor gives you leave to-day,
To ſee and ſpeak to him.

This ſpectacle was pleaſing; but it was the

only good thing in the whole play. For my part, I muſt confeſs it was not without ſome dread that I introduced on the French theatre the ſenators of Rome in red robes, and giving their opinions. I remembered that when I had formerly introduced in Oedipus, a chorus of Thebans ſaying,

O Death! we all implore thy dreadful aid;
Grant our deſires, and terminate our days!

The pit, inſtead of being ſeriouſly affected, was only ſtruck with the pretended ridicule of giving theſe lines to be repeated by actors who were unaccuſtomed to ſuch ſolemn dirges; and, inſtead of applauding the intent, the execution was laughed at. This is what hindered me from making the ſenators ſpeak in Brutus, when Titus is accuſed before them; and from encreaſing the terror of the ſituation by the ſurpriſe and grief of theſe fathers of Rome, who muſt have marked their aſtoniſhment, otherwiſe than by dumb ſhew; but which was not put in execution.

However, my lord, if there are any tolerable paſſages in this work, I am obliged for it to my friends who think like you. They encouraged me to moderate the ſeverity of Brutus's temper by paternal love, that the effort he makes in condemning his ſon might be the more pitied and admired. They adviſed me to give Tullia a character of tenderneſs and innocence; becauſe, if I had made her a haughty heroine capable of ſpeaking to Titus, as to a ſubject who ſhould

obey his ſovereign, Titus would have been debaſed, and the ambaſſador would have been uſeleſs. They deſired, that Titus ſhould be drawn a young man violent in his paſſions, loving Rome and his father, adoring Tullia, thinking it his duty to be faithful to the very ſenate by which he thought himſelf injured, and hurried away from his duty by a paſſion which he imagined he was maſter of.

And in fact, if Titus had been of the opinion of his miſtreſs, and had given ſufficient reaſons in favour of kingly authority, Brutus then would be looked upon as a leader of rebels: Titus would feel no more remorſe; Brutus would not have excited his paſſion.

They deſired me alſo to take care that Brutus's ſons ſhould not both appear upon the ſtage, becauſe the intereſt is loſt when divided; "but above all, ſaid they, let your piece be ſimple; imitate that excellency of the Greeks; be aſſured that a multiplicity of events, and a complication of intereſts is only the reſource of barren minds, who are capable of drawing from one paſſion the matter of five acts; ſtrive to finiſh every ſcene as if it were the only one you had to write. Beautiful details are what ſupports a work in verſe, and makes it deſcend to poſterity. It is often the peculiar manner of expreſſing common thoughts, it is that art of embelliſhing by diction what every man feels equally well, that makes the great poet. There are neither far-fetched ſentiments nor romantic adventures in the fourth book of Virgil; all is extremely natural, and yet it is the greateſt effort of the hu-

man mind. Racine is ſo very much ſuperior to thoſe who ſaid the ſame things he did; only becauſe he ſaid them better. Corneille is never truly great, but when his expreſſions are equal to his thoughts. Remember this precept of Mr. Boileau:

Et qui tout ce qu'il dit facile à retenir,
De ſon ouvrage en vous laiſſe un long ſouvenir.*

This is what is wanting in a great many dramatic works, which by the art of an actor and the voice and figure of an actreſs, have met with ſucceſs on our theatres. How many ill wrote plays have had more repreſentations than Cinna † or Britannicus ‡? but who has ever got by heart a line of any of theſe ſlimſy performances, while every body remembers Cinna and Britannicus? It was in vain that the Regulus of Pardon drew tears from us by ſome affecting ſituations; the piece, and all ſuch pieces, are utterly deſpiſed, though the authors ſhould trumpet their own praiſe in their prefaces."

I believe, my lord, you are going to aſk how it came about that ſuch judicious critics ſhould give me leave to mention love in a tragedy which bears the title of Junius Brutus, and to mix this paſſion with the auſtere virtue of a Roman ſenate, and the politics of an ambaſſador?

* Let every thing you write be ſo natural that it will be eaſily imprinted on the mind.

† One of Corneille's fineſt tragedies, by many looked upon as his maſter-piece.

‡ A tragedy of Racine's.

Our nation is upbraided with having enervated the theatre by too much love; and the Engliſh deſerve the ſame reproach for very near a century paſt; for you have always borrowed part of our vices and our fashions. But will you give me leave to mention *my* opinion on this ſubject?

To inſiſt on having love in every tragedy ſeems to me to be an effeminate taſte: To baniſh it from all, would be, I think, a very unreaſonable piece of ill-humour.

The theatre, either tragic or comic, is the living picture of the paſſions of mankind. The ambition of a prince is repreſented in a tragedy; and in a comedy private vanity is rendered ridiculous. In one, you laugh at the coquetry and intrigues of a citizen's wife, and in the other you lament the unhappy paſſion of a Phaedra. In the ſame manner, love diverts you in a romance, and tranſports you in Virgil's Dido.

Love is not a more eſſential fault in a tragedy, than it is in the Æneid. It can be only cenſured when improperly introduced, or handled without art.

The Greeks ſeldom ventured this paſſion on the theatre of Athens; becauſe, in the firſt place, their tragedies having been originally founded on dreadful ſubjects, the minds of the ſpectators were accuſtomed to this kind of ſpectacles. In the ſecond place, the women lived a much more retired life than ours do, ſo that the language of love was not then, as it is now, the ſubject of every converſation; and the poets therefore were leſs inclined to introduce a paſſi-

on, which is the moſt difficult of all to be accurately deſcribed, and nicely handled; as it requires the greateſt caution, and is ſuſceptible of the greateſt delicacies.

A third reaſon which ſeems to me to be of ſome weight, is, that there were then no actreſſes; the women's parts were performed by men, whoſe faces were covered with maſks. Love muſt have neceſſarily appeared ridiculous in their mouths.

It is quite the contrary in London and Paris. I muſt own, that authors would have little underſtood their intereſt, or little known their audience's inclinations, if they had never made an Oldfield, a Duclos *, or a le Couvreur † ſpeak but of ambition or politics.

The misfortune is, that love in our theatrical heroes is often nothing more than gallantry; and in yours, it ſometimes runs into mere debauchery.

In our Alcibiades, a play very well conducted, but poorly wrote, and therefore little eſteemed, theſe bad verſes ſpoke in an enchanting tone by the Æſop ‡ of the laſt age were long admired:

Ah! lorſque pénétré d'un amour veritable,
En gemiſſant aux peids d'un objet adorable,

* † The two moſt famous actreſſes that Fance has poſſeſſed, before the Dumeſnil and Clairon of the preſent times, who are equal, if not ſuperior, to thoſe of any age or nation.

‡ Suppoſed to be Baron, who is talked of in France, as probably poſterity will in England talk of Mr. Garrick.

J'ai connu, dans ſes yeaux timides ou diſtraits,
Que mes ſoins de ſon cœur ont pu troubler la paix,
Que par l'aveu ſecret d'une ardeur mutuelle ;
La mienne a pris encore une force nouvelle ;
Dans ces momens ſi doux, j'ai cent fois eprouvé,
Qu'un mortel peut goûter un bonheur achevé *.

In your Venice preſerved, old Renaud wants to raviſh the wife of Jaffier, and ſhe complains of it in terms not very decent, ſaying, that he came to her unbuttoned, &c.

That love might be worthy of the tragic ſcene, it ſhould become the neceſſary knot of the play, and not be brought in to fill up the vacancies of your tragedies and ours, which are, both, too long; it muſt be a paſſion truly tragic, conſidered as a weakneſs, and reſiſted by remorſe. Either love muſt be the cauſe of crimes and misfortunes, in order to ſhew the danger of ſuch a paſſion, or virtue muſt get the better of it, to prove that it is not irreſiſtible. Otherwiſe it will be more properly adapted to eclogues and to comedy

It is you, my lord, who are to determine

* With tender paſſion, when my breaſt was warm'd,
And ſoftly ſighing at the fair one's feet,
By the dear language of her eyes I found
My love had raiſed new conflicts in her breaſt ;
When, by the wiſh'd confeſſion of her flame,
The ardor I expreſſed received new ſtrength ;
In theſe ſweet moments, loving and beloved,
I often felt that man is ſometimes bleſs'd
With happineſs complete.

whether I have fulfilled any of these conditions; but above all things, I beg your friends will not judge of the taste of genius of our nation by this essay, and the tragedy that I send you. I am perhaps one of those who apply to literature in France with the least success; and if the opinions, which I here submit to your judgment, be disapproved of, I alone am to bear the blame.

Of Love-Intrigues in Tragedy.

In a letter to father Porée.*

I ſend you, my reverend father, the edition that has been lately publiſhed of the tragedy of Oedipus †. I have endeavoured to throw out, as much as poſſible, the ſilly expreſſions of a miſ-placed intrigue, which I had been obliged to introduce, among the bold and manly ſtrokes that the ſubject required. You muſt know, in my juſtification, that young as I was, when I wrote Oedipus, I compoſed it pretty much in the ſame manner, in which it will now appear to you. My head was full of the antients, and of your inſtructions; I knew but little of the theatre of Paris, but was better acquainted with that of Athens. I conſulted Mr. Dacier ‡, who

* Prefixed to the tragedy of Oedipus.

† The author wrote this play when he was but nineteen. It was acted in the year 1718, and ran forty-five nights ſucceſſively.

‡ A famous French critic, particularly fond of, and well acquainted with, the Grecian language and writings. He tranſlated Hippocrates and other books from the Greek into the French.

adviſed me to introduce a chorus in every ſcene after the manner of the Greeks, which was adviſing me to walk in the ſtreets of Paris in Plato's robes. It was with difficulty that I could prevail upon the actors of Paris to admit a chorus three or four times only, during the whole play. It was ſtill more difficult to make them accept a tragedy almoſt entirely void of amorous intrigue. The actreſſes laughed at me when they perceived there was no miſtreſs's part. The ſcene of the double diſcovery between Oedipus and Jocaſta, partly taken from Sophocles, appeared to them quite inſipid. In ſhort, the actors who were great men at that time, and great coxcombs, abſolutely refuſed to bring on the play. I was then extremely young; I ſuppoſed, they muſt be in the right. In compliance to them, I ſpoiled the whole tragedy, by introducing tender ſentiments in a ſubject ſo little ſuſceptible of them. When there was a love-intrigue, the players began to be ſatisfied; but were ſtill entirely againſt the important ſcene between Oedipus and Jocaſta. Sophocles and his imitator were both laughed at. I argued the caſe; and employed ſome friends, by whoſe intereſt Oedipus was at laſt repreſented. One of the players, whoſe name was Quinaut, ſaid, that to puniſh me for my obſtinacy, they ought to act it with it's bad fourth act taken from the Greek. Beſides, it was looked upon as the greateſt mark of raſhneſs in me, to dare to undertake a ſubject which Peter Corneille had already handled ſo ſucceſsfully. Corneille's Oedipus at that time was thought excellent; but, for my part, I

found it a very bad performance: twelve years ago I dared not ſay ſo; but now every body is of my opinion. It is ſometimes a great while before juſtice is exactly adminiſtered. The two Oedipus' of Mr de la Motte * had their proper value ſet, in a ſhorter time. The reverend father de Tournemine has probably ſhewn you the preface, in which I declare war to that author. Mr. de la Motte is a very ingenious man; he ſomewhat reſembles the Grecian wreſtler, who, when he was actually down, proved by force of argument, that he was the conqueror.

I entirely differ in my opinions from Mr. de la Motte; but you have taught me to diſpute like a gentleman. I write againſt him in ſo civil a manner, that I deſired he ſhould be the examiner of this very preface, in which I endeavour in every line, to point out his miſtakes; and he has himſelf approved my little polemical diſſertation. It is thus men of letters ſhould diſpute; and thus they would attack each other had they been bred under your care; but in general, they are as ſatirical as lawyers, and as choleric as janſeniſts †. The human letters are become extremely inhumane. Men of literature injure, cabal,

* A very ingenious French writer; the moſt remarkable of his works is a volume of fables in verſe, on a different plan from Æſop's; inſtead of beaſts, he introduces and perſonifies, in a very delicate and moral manner, the different qualities of the mind, as well as the ſeveral virtues we are capable of, and the vices we are prone to.

† A religous ſect in France, which, like all other new ſects that are perſecuted, is remarkably rigid, zealous, and paſſionate.

calumniate and lampoon each other. It is ſurprizing that people will take the liberty to write things they dare not ſpeak. For my part, I have learned from you, reverend father, to avoid ſuch meanneſſes; you have taught me how to live, as well as how to write.

The Muſes ſweet, heavenly train,
Are not an envious ſiſt'rhood:
Ambroſia is their conſtant food,
Wormwood and bitters they diſdain:
And when from Jupiter a call
Brings them to th' immortal hall,
Where gods aſſemble and rejoice;
There, ſpiteful Satyr's harſher ſound,
[So Jove decreed,] was never found
To mingle with the muſes voice ‡.

Adieu, my dear reverend father; I ſhall be ever devoted to you and yours with that tender acknowlegement which is due to you, and which your pupils do not always preſerve.

‡ The tranſlator, who has no ſort of pretence to poetry, has attempted the above lines, merely to ſhew that the original was in verſe. The number of verſes, length of lines, and return of rhyme, are the ſame as in the French.

A DEFENCE of the laws of the DRAMA, concerning the unities of Action, Place and Time; againſt the opinion of Monſeur de la MOTTE. In the Preface to OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS, of which a new edition is now publiſhed, was repreſented, for the firſt time, in the beginning of the year 1718. The public received it with great indulgence, and has often ſeen it ſince, with pleaſure: which I attribute, partly, to the advantage this tragedy has always met with, of being extremely well acted, and partly, to the ſolemnity and pathos of the ſubject. Father Folard a jeſuit, and Mr. de la Motte of the French academy, have ſince handled the ſame ſubject, and both have avoided the faults which I have been guilty of. It would not become me to give an account of their performances. My criticiſms, and, even my praiſes, would appear equally ſuſpicious *.

* Mr. de la Motte publiſhed two Oedipuſes in 1726, one in rhyme, the other in proſe. The Oedipus in rhyme appeared on the ſtage four nights; the other was never acted. Voltaire.

I am ſtill leſs inclined to attempt, upon this occaſion, laying down rules for the conduct of a dramatic poem. I am perſuaded that all the ſubtile reaſoning on this ſubject, which has been ſo much repeated for ſome years paſt, is not worth one maſterly ſcene, and that there is more to be learned in Polyeuctes * and Cinna †, than in all the precepts of the abbe d' Aubignac ‡. Severus § and Paulina § are the true maſters of the art. So, many books wrote on painting by men of taſte, do not inſtruct a diſciple ſo much as ſeeing a ſingle head by Raphael

The principles of the arts, which depend on the imagination, are all eaſy and ſimple, all drawn from nature and from reaſon. Pardon ‡ and Boyer † knew them as perfectly as Corneille or Racine. The difference always has lain, and ever will lie, in the application of them. The

* † Two admired tragedies wrote by the elder Corneille.

‡ A great theatrical critic, but much in the ſame ſituation with our Rymer, who, notwithſtanding all his rules, was unable to write a tolerable play himſelf,

§ § Characters in Corneille's Polyeuctes.

‡ † Two French dramatic authors of the laſt age; Pardon was a very correct, but weak, writer; he was particularly the rival of Mr. Racine, and not without ſome ſhew of ſucceſs; but Racine has ſtood the teſt, while Pardon is entirely forgot. Boyer's plays are ſtill leſs known than thoſe of Pardon.

authors of Armida * and Iſſé †, and the very worſt compoſers, followed the ſame rules of muſic. Le Pouſſin worked from the ſame principles with Vignon. It ſeems therefore to as little purpoſe to talk about rules at the head of a play, as it would be, for a painter to begin by a diſſertation on his pictures, or for a muſician to attempt proving that his compoſition ought to pleaſe.

But as Mr. de la Motte wants to eſtabliſh rules directly contrary to thoſe which have been followed by our great maſters; it is proper to aſſert the cauſe of theſe antient laws, not becauſe they are antient, but becauſe they are juſt and neceſſary, and might meet in a man of his merit, a formidable antagoniſt.

Mr. de la Motte would fain baniſh the unities of action, place, and time.

The French were the firſt among the mo-

* Signior Baptiſta Lulli, of whom the Spectator thus ſpeaks: "He found the French muſic extremely defective, and very often barbarous: However, knowing the genius of the people, the humour of their language, and the prejudiced ears he had to deal with, he did not pretend to extirpate the French muſic, and plant the Italian in its ſtead; but only to cultivate and civilize it with innumerable graces and modulations, which he borrowed from the Italian. By this means the French muſic is now perfect in its kind; and when you ſay it is not ſo good as the Italian, you only mean that it does not pleaſe you ſo well; for there is ſcarce a Frenchman who would not wonder to hear you give the Italian ſuch a preference."

† Monſieur Rameau, the preſent Handel of the French, who now no longer relish the muſic of Baptiſta Lulli.

derns who revived theſe wiſe dramatic laws. The other nations continued a great while without receiving a yoke that ſeemed ſo ſtrict; but as it was a reaſonable one, and that reaſon gets the better of every thing at laſt, they have all now bent to it. The Engliſh writers at preſent affect to declare before their plays, that the continuance of the action is the ſame with that of the repreſentation; they go farther than us, who have been in this point their maſters.

The learned of every country begin to look upon thoſe ages as barbarous, in which, theſe laws were unknown to the greateſt geniuſes, ſuch as Lopez de Vega * and Shakeſpear. They confeſs the obligation they have to us, for recovering them from that barbariſm. Is it poſſible that a Frenchman can now employ all his parts and talents in order to bring us back to it again? Though I had had nothing elſe to ſay againſt Mr. de la Motte's opinion, but that Corneille, Racine, Moliere, Addiſon, Congreve, Maffei, have all ſubmitted to the dramatic laws which he endeavours to ſubvert, it ſhould be ſufficient to deter any body that was tempted to break through them; but Mr. de la Motte deſerves to be anſwered with arguments, rather than with authorities

What is a dramatic performance? the repreſentation of an action. Why not of two or three actions? becauſe the mind is incapable of comprehending ſeveral objects at the ſame time;

* The greateſt dramatic poet of the Spaniards, and almoſt the only one, whoſe works are known abroad.

becauſe the intereſt, which is divided, is ſoon deſtroyed; becauſe we are even ſhocked at ſeeing two different pieces of hiſtory in the ſame picture; and becauſe nature alone points out to us this precept, which ought to be as invariable as nature's ſelf.

For the ſame reaſons, the unity of place is alſo eſſential; for one action is neceſſarily confined to one place. If the perſons repreſented are at Athens in the firſt act, how can they get to Perſia by the ſecond? Has Le Brun ever drawn Alexander at Arbella and in the Indies on the ſame canvas? "I ſhould not be ſurprized, ſays Mr. de la Motte, artfully, that a people of ſenſe, but leſs fond of rules, ſhould be ſatisfied to ſee Coriolanus repreſented, as condemned at Rome in the firſt act; received by the Volſcii in the third; and beſieging Rome in the fourth, etc."

In the firſt place, I cannot conceive how a rational and learned people ſhould not be fond of rules which are the reſult of good ſenſe, and calculated to heighten their entertainment. In the ſecond place, every body muſt perceive that what Mr. de la Motte mentions as the proper ſubject for one tragedy, in fact, contains ſubjects for three; and that this project, though it be well executed, would be nothing more than a plot of Jodelle's * or Hardy's †, finely verſified by a good modern poet.

The unity of time is naturally joined to the

* † Two French poets, cotemporary with our Shakeſpear, guilty of his faults, but not poſſeſſed of his genius

other unities. When I am present at a play, that is, at the representation of an action, I mean to see the accomplishment of that one action. Suppose, for instance, a conspiracy at Rome against Augustus: I want to know what will become of Augustus and of the conspirators. If the poet lengthens out the action to a fortnight, he must give me an account of what passes during that time, for my business there is to be informed of every things that happens, and nothing useless should happen. If he relates what passes every day, there are then fifteen different actions of more or less consequence. It is no longer accomplishing the conspiracy, which he should come to at once, but giving a long history which cannot be interesting, as it only serves to keep back the decision of the event which I am impatient to be acquainted with. I did not come to the play for the history of a hero, but to see one action of his life.

Besides, the spectator is but three hours at the play, and therefore the action should only last three hours. Cinna, Andromache *, Bajazet †, Oedipus either Corneille's or Mr. de la Motte's, or mine (if I may mention it here), are not of a longer duration. If other plots require a greater length of time for their execution, it is a license only pardonable in favour of very great beauties, and the farther this license is extended, the greater the fault must be.

* † Two of Racine's tragedies; the first has been translated, or rather imitated in a very masterly manner by Mr. Phillips, under the title of the Distressed Mother.

We often lengthen the unity of time to twenty-four hours, and that of place to a large palace. More ſtrictneſs would exclude many fine ſubjects, and more indulgences would give room to much abuſe. For, if it were once allowed that the plot of a play might take in two days, it would be ſoon extended to ſix months by the firſt author whoſe plan would ſo require it; and another would take up two years; and, if the ſcene of action was not limited to ſome one ſpot, we ſhould have plays in the manner of Shakeſpear's Julius Caeſar, in which Brutus and Caſſius are at Rome in the firſt act, and in Theſſaly in the laſt. The obſervation of theſe laws not only contributes to the avoiding of many faults, but alſo gives riſe to ſeveral beauties; in the ſame manner as the rules of architecture, when exactly followed, neceſſarily compoſe a pleaſing ſtructure. When the unities of action, place and time are preſerved, the play muſt of conſequence be ſimple; and this ſimplicity is the great merit of all Racine's works, and the merit which Ariſtotle required. Mr. de la Motte, in defending a tragedy of his own writing, prefers a multitude of events to this noble ſimplicity. He thinks his arguments confirmed by the example of Berenice * which is not liked, and the great eſteem in which the Cid † is held to this day.

* A tragedy of Racine's, entirely founded on this one paſſage in Livy, *Titus Reginam Berenicen, qui etiam nuptias pollicitus ferebatur, ſtatim ab urbe dimiſit invitus invitam.* The want of incidents hindered this play from proceeding on the ſtage, though it is a maſter-piece of art, delicacy, and ſentiment.

† A play wrote by Corneille, and taken from the

It is certain the Cid is more affecting than Berenice, which laſt, is rather an elegy than a ſimple tragedy; the Cid, the plot of which is truly tragic, does not owe its ſucceſs to the multiplicity of events, but it pleaſes notwithſtanding that multiplicity: it affects notwithſtanding the infanta; not on account of the infanta.

Mr. de la Motte is of opinion, that a writer may entirely deſpiſe theſe laws, and content himſelf with the unity of intereſt, which he ſays he has found out, and calls a paradox: but this unity ſeems to me to be nothing more than the unity of action. "If ſeveral perſonages, ſays Mr. de la Motte, are differently intereſted in the ſame event, and are all worthy of my entering into their paſſions, there is, then, an unity of action, though not an unity of intereſt".

Since I have taken the liberty to diſpute upon this point, with Mr. de la Motte, I have read over the diſcourſe of the great Corneille on the three unities; who is worthier of being conſulted than I am. He expreſſes himſelf in this manner: "My opinion then is, and I have already mentioned it, that the unity of action conſiſts in the unity of intrigue and in the unity of danger." Let the reader peruſe this part of Corneille's works, and he will ſoon determine between Mr. de la Motte and me; and though I were not ſtrength-

Spaniſh; it was ſo much liked by Cardinal Richelieu, who, beſides, was fond of poetic fame, that he offered a ſum equalling five thouſand pounds ſterling to let him paſs for the author of it; but Corneille had too much ſpirit, and too great a love for laurel glory to conſent to ſuch a bargain.

ened by the authority of this great man, I have an argument of ſtill greater force, which is experience. In our beſt tragedies, the chief perſonages are all differently intereſted; but theſe different intereſts are ſubſervient to that of the principal perſonage, and, then, there is unity of action.

If on the other hand, all theſe different intereſts are not ſubſervient to the principal actor, if they are not ſo many lines which tend to one center, the intereſt is double; and what is called action upon the ſtage, is alſo double. Let us therefore keep up as Corneille did, to the three unities, in which, all other rules, that is, all other beauties, are included. Yet Mr. de la Motte calls them principles of fancy, and pretends we may do without them in our tragedies, as well as neglect them in our operas; which, in my opinion, is endeavouring to reform a regular government upon the example of an anarchy.

The opera is an entertainment ſingular and odd, as it is magnificent and ſtriking; where the ears and eyes are better ſatisfied than the mind; where, through a conſtant ſubſerviency to muſic, the moſt ridiculous faults are become neceſſary*; where the actors dance around a tomb,

* Mr. Addiſon, who in general was averſe to operas, ſo far agrees with monſieur de Voltaire in this particular, as to ſay, "An opera may be allowed to be extravagantly laviſh in its decorations, as its only deſign is to gratify the ſenſes, and keep up an indolent attention in the audience."

and ſing at the deſtruction of a town; where you may ſee now Pluto's palace, now the palace of the ſun; where gods and demons, magicians, monſters and miracles are formed and deſtroyed in the twinkling of an eye. We tolerate theſe extravagancies, we are even fond of them, becauſe we ſuppoſe ourſelves on enchanted ground; and provided there be ſome ſhow, fine dancing, delightful muſic, and a few intereſting ſcenes, we are ſatisfied. It would be as ridiculous to expect the unities of action, place and time, preſerved in Alceſtes*, as it would be to attempt introducing dances and devils, in Cinna or in Rodogune.

And though we diſpenſe with rules in our operas, yet theſe dramatic laws are ſo natural and neceſſary, and contribute ſo much to entertain the ſpectator, that the beſt operas are thoſe, in which, they are leaſt broke through; and there are ſome even, in which they are ſtrictly obſerved. How then can Mr. de la Motte reproach his country-men with levity in condemning in one ſpectacle, what they approve in another?

There is no one but could make the following

* One of the firſt and fineſt of the French operas; the muſic was compoſed by Baptiſta Lulli, and the words by Quinaut, who was a man of real poetic genius and taſte, as it is now generally allowed in France, notwithſtanding Boileau's criticiſm and contempt of this writer, which he ſhewed in the following lines:

Si je penſe exprimer un auteur ſans defaut,
La raiſon, dit Virgile, et la Rime Quinaut.

anſwer to Mr. de la Motte: " I have a right to expect much greater perfection in a tragedy than in an opera, becauſe in a tragedy my attention is not divided; it is not from a well tuned note, nor from a finely-executed ſtep, that my pleaſure is to ariſe; my mind alone is to be ſatisfied." I admire a man who can conduct and bring about in one place, and in the ſame day, a ſingle event, which I conceive without fatigue, and which affects me by degrees. The more I ſee that this ſimplicity is difficult, the more I am pleaſed with it; and if afterwards I would fain account for this ſatisfaction, I find myſelf of Boileau's opinion, who ſays,

Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour, un ſeul fait accompli
Tienne juſqu'à la fin le théatre rempli. *

I have, beſides, in my favour, the authority of the great Corneille; I have alſo his example, and the pleaſure which his plays afford me in proportion as he has, more or leſs, ſtrictly obeyed this rule.

Mr. de la Motte, not content to baniſh from the ſtage theſe fundamental laws, would fain alſo exclude poetry from it, and introduce tragedies in proſe.

This ingenious and fertile author, who has been all his life writing poetry, or ſomething in proſe relative to his poetry, now rails at his

* The theatre ſhould be taken up from the firſt to the laſt act with a ſingle event; paſt in one day and in one place.

own art, and treats it with the ſame contempt that he treated Homer, whom, however, he has deigned to tranſlate. Neither Virgil, Taſſo, Boileau, Racine, or Mr. Pope, ever took it into their heads to write againſt the harmony of verſe, nor Lulli againſt muſic, nor Sir Iſaac Newton againſt the mathematics. Some men have been weak enough to think themſelves above their profeſſion; but none ſtrove to make their profeſſion contemptible. There are too many people who deſpiſe poetry, becauſe they are not acquainted with it. Paris is full of men of underſtanding, born with organs ſenſible of all harmony, to whom muſic is but noiſe, and poetry but ingenious fancies. If theſe perſons find out that a man of parts who has publiſhed five or ſix volumes of poems, is of their opinion, will not they think that they have a right to look upon all other poets as madmen; and Mr. de la Motte as the only one, who has recovered his underſtanding? it is therefore neceſſary to anſwer his objections for the honour of the art, and I may ſay, for the honour of a country, who owes part of its glory, among foreigners, to the perfection of this very art.

Mr. de la Motte aſſerts that rhyme is a barbarous cuſtom lately introduced. And yet all the people of the earth, except the antient Greeks and Romans, have always rhymed and continue to do ſo to this day. The return of the ſame ſounds is ſo natural to man, that it is as common among the ſavages, as it is at Rome, at Paris, at London, or at Madrid. Montaigne has a ſong in American rhymes tranſlated into

French, and in one of Mr. Addiſon's ſpectators there is a tranſlation of a Lapland ode in rhyme, which is full of ſentiment and expreſſion. The Greeks, *quibus dedit ore rotundo muſa loqui*, born under a happier climate, and favoured by nature with organs more delicate than other nations, formed a language, whoſe ſyllables, by their different length and ſhortneſs, were capable of expreſſing the ſlow or rapid motions of the ſoul. From this variety of ſounds there reſulted, in their poetry and even in their proſe, a harmony which the antient Italians felt and imitated; but which, no other nation has been ſince able to attain. But poetry, which is what Mr. de la Motte argues againſt, whether it be rhyme, or cadenced ſyllables, has ever been, and will be ever, cultivated by all nations.

Before Herodotus, even hiſtory was wrote in verſe by the Grecians, who took that cuſtom from the antient Ægyptians, the wiſeſt, moſt learned, and beſt governed people of the earth. This cuſtom was a very rational one; for the deſign of hiſtory was to preſerve to future ages, the memory of the few men whoſe example deſerved imitation. People then did not take it into their heads to publiſh the hiſtory of a convent or a village in ſeveral volumes in folio*.

* Voluminous hiſtories of unimportant places and things are much more frequent among the French than with us. As they are, in great meaſure, debarred from the two moſt intereſting ſubjects, religion and government, and as they have among them numberleſs bookiſh Friars who can thus employ their time and ſatisfy their vanity,

Nothing was wrote but what was worthy of being read, and of being retained. And on this account the harmony of verſe was made uſe of to help the memory; and therefore the firſt philoſophers, legiſlators, founders of religions and hiſtorians were all poets.

One would ſuſpect that poetry ſhould be defective, on ſuch ſubjects, either in preciſion or in harmony: but ſince Virgil has united theſe two great qualities which ſeem incompatible; ſince Boileau and Racine have equalled Virgil; can a man, who has read them all three, and knows they are tranſlated into moſt of the European languages, thus debaſe a talent which has gained himſelf ſo much honour? I compared our Boileau and Racine to the author of the Æneid, for the beauty of the verſification; becauſe Virgil, had he been born at Paris, would have wrote in rhyme as they have done, and were they cotemporaries of Horace and Auguſtus, they would have made the ſame uſe that Virgil did, of the meaſure of Latin verſe. Mr. de la Motte therefore, when he calls verſification a ridiculous mechanic operation, not only accuſes of this ridicule all our great poets, but even all antiquity. Virgil and Horace ſubjected themſelves to as mechanic an operation as our modern authors. A proper diſpoſition of ſpondees and dactyles was

there is ſcarce a town or conſiderable convent, of which there are not elaborate memoirs drawn up, printed and forgot. The benedictine Monks are particularly remarkable for theſe huge compilations.

full as troubleſome to find out as our rhymes or hemiſtics. It muſt have been extremely laborious; for the Æneid, after eleven years ſtudy, was not yet brought to perfection.

Mr. de la Motte maintains, that at leaſt a ſcene of tragedy put into proſe loſes nothing of its beauty or its force. To prove his aſſertion, he turns into proſe the firſt ſcene of Mithridates; and it is no longer worth reading.

But he adds, "our neighbours have baniſhed rhyme from their tragedies." It is very true; but their tragedies are in verſe, becauſe harmony is neceſſary and pleaſing to every people. The queſtion then conſiſts in this, whether our French verſes ought to be in rhyme or not. Corneille and Racine have employed rhyme: let us take care, that if we get into another road, it is not rather through an incapacity of following the ſteps of theſe great men, than for the ſake of novelty. The Italians and Engliſh can do without rhyme, becauſe their languages admit of tranſpoſitions, and that in their poetry they take ſeveral licences which we are debarred from. Every language poſſeſſes peculiar advantages determined by the nature and conſtruction of its phraſes, by the frequent uſe of its vowels or conſonants, by its tranſpoſition, its auxiliary verbs, etc. The beauties of ours conſiſt in its perſpicuity and elegance; we allow no liberties in our poetry, which, like our proſe, is to proceed in the direct order of the ideas. A return of the ſame ſounds is therefore abſolutely neceſſary with us, in or-

der to diſtinguiſh poetry from proſe. Every body is acquainted with the following lines;

Où me cacher? Fuyons dans la nuit infernale.
Mais que dis-je? Mon pere y tient l'urne fatal;
Le ſort, dit-on, l'a miſe en ſes ſéveres mains;
Minos juge aux enfers tous les pâles humains.

Let us take away the rhyme in this manner;

Où me cacher? Fuyons dans la nuit infernale,
Mais que dis-je? Mon pere y tient l'urne funeſte;
Le ſort, dit-on, l'a miſe en ſes ſéveres mains;
Minos juge aux enfers tous les pâles mortels *

How poetic ſoever theſe lines are, yet do they afford the ſame pleaſure when deprived of the charm of rhyme? The Engliſh and the Italians would ſay as well as the Greeks or Romans, les *pales humains* Minos *aux enfers juge*, and would make one line run gracefully into the next. The very manner of reading verſes in Italian and in Engliſh, marks the ſhort and long ſyllables, which ſupport the harmony without the neceſſity of rhyme. For our part, who have none of theſe advantages, why ſhould we baniſh thoſe which the nature of our language admits of?

Mr. da la Motte compares our poets, that is, our Corneilles, our Racines, our Boileaus, to

* The above lines are quoted, merely to ſhew the particular character of the French poetry: a tranſlation of them would therefore have ſerved no *ſort of purpoſe*.

writers of acroſtics, or to quacks who paſs grains of corn through the eye of a needle, and adds, that all theſe puerilities have no other merit but that merely of overcoming a difficulty.

I allow that bad verſes are pretty much in this ſituation. They differ from bad proſe only in the rhyme; and rhyme alone neither makes the merit of the poet, nor the entertainment of the reader. It is not mere ſpondees and dactyls that create delight in Virgil and Homer. But what charms every where is the fine harmony which reſults from this difficult meaſure. He muſt be a fool who contents himſelf with overcoming difficulties for the meer pleaſure of gaining ſuch a victory; but he that draws from theſe very obſtacles, beauties that are univerſally pleaſing, muſt be a man of exquiſite parts and judgment. It is extremely difficult to draw fine pictures, to carve fine ſtatues, to compoſe good muſic, or to write good verſes, and therefore the name of the few great men who have ſurmounted all thoſe obſtacles, will probably laſt longer than the kingdoms where they were born.

I might take the liberty to diſpute with Mr. de la Motte on ſome other points: but that perhaps would look like a deſign of attacking him perſonally, and make me ſuſpected of malice towards him, which, in fact, I am as remote from, as I am from his opinions. I am much better pleaſed to avail myſelf of the ingenious obſervations he has interſperſed in his book, than to undertake confuting ſome which I do not take to be ſo well founded as the reſt. It is enough that I have

endeavoured the defence of an art I am fond of, and which he ought to have defended himſelf.

I will add one word more, relative to an ode in favour of harmony, in which Mr. de la Faye attacks in fine poetry, the ſyſtem of Mr. de la Motte, who has anſwered him only in proſe. I will quote a ſingle ſtanza which unites almoſt all the reaſons that I have alleged in my favour:

De la contrainte rigoureuſe
Où l'eſprit ſemble reſſerré
Il reçoit cette force heureuſe,
Qui l'éleve au plus haut dégré.
Telle, dans des canaux preſſée,
Avec plus de force élancée,
L'onde s'éleve dans les airs;
Et la régle qui ſemble auſtere,
N'eſt qu'un art plus certain de plaire
Inſéparable des beaux vers *.

Mr. de la Motte, who ſhould have anſwered

* From theſe very rigourous laws,
By which we think ourſelves reſtrain'd,
The mind it's ſtrength and beauty draws,
And profiteth by being chain'd:
So, in narrower conduits preſt,
Th' aſcent of water's manag'd beſt,
Jetteaus form, ſo much in faſhion.
The rules, which ſeem ſo very hard,
Are rules to pleaſe, which guide the bard
To poetry's perfection.

Theſe Engliſh lines are inſerted merely to give the ſenſe of the original, without the leaſt attempt to equal it in harmony or expreſſion.

this juſt and graceful compariſon by following the example of its author, enters into an enquiry whether the narrowneſs of the conduits contributes to the aſcent of liquids, or whether that aſcent is not, rather, in proportion to the height from which the waters firſt deſcend; and "Can we find, ſays he, in verſe more than in proſe, this primary elevation of thoughts, &c."

I believe Mr. de la Motte miſtakes, as a philoſopher; for it is certain, that without the conſtraint in which the water is held in pipes, it would not aſcend, though it ſhould have deſcended from ever ſo great an elevation; and I think he is ſtill in a greater error as a poet; for, it is very plain, that as the conſtraint of verſification cauſes that harmony which is pleaſing to the ear; in like manner from the kind of priſon in which the waters flow, jetteaus reſult, which are agreeable to the eye. Is not the compariſon both juſt and pleaſing? Mr. de la Faye certainly took a better method with Mr. de la Motte than I have done: He followed the example of an antient philoſopher, who, in anſwer to a ſophiſter that denied motion, began to walk in his preſence. Mr. de la Motte denies the harmony of verſes: a circumſtance that alone ſhould put me in mind to finiſh my proſe.

On Elegance of Expreſſion in Tragedy.

In the preface to Herod and Mariamne.*

I Tremble in giving this edition. I have remarked ſo many plays applauded on the ſtage, which have been afterwards deſpiſed in the cloſet, that I am afraid leſt mine ſhould meet with the ſame fate. One or two intereſting ſituations, the actors art, and the readineſs which I ſhewed to own and correct my faults, might have gained me ſome approbation, when it was acted. But many more qualifications are neceſſary to ſatisfy the cool deliberate reader. A plot regularly conducted will contribute but little to that end; and though it ſhould be affecting, yet even that will not be ſufficient: all poetical performances, though ever ſo perfect in other points,

* Mariamne was firſt acted in the year 1723. Baron, who was ſirnamed the Æſop of the French, performed the part of Herod; but he was then too old to ſupport this vehement character. Adrianne Le Couvreur, the beſt actreſs that ever exiſted, played the part of Mariamne. This princeſs was to die by poiſon which ſhe was to take upon the ſtage. It was about the feſtival of the kings or twelfth night that this play firſt appeared, and a young coxcomb, who was in the pit, on ſeeing the empoiſoned draught preſented to Mariamne, took into his head to cry out, "the queen drinks †." All the Frenchmen began to laugh, and the peice was

muſt neceſſarily diſpleaſe, if the lines are not ſtrong and harmonious, and if there does not run through the whole a continued elegance and inexpreſſible charm of verſe, that genius only can inſpire, that wit alone can never attain, and about which, people have argued ſo ill, and to ſo little purpoſe, ſince the death of Boileau.

It is a very groſs miſtake to imagine that the verſification is the leaſt eſſential and leaſt difficult part of a theatrical piece. Mr. Racine, than whom, after Virgil, no man ever knew better the art of verſifying, was not of that opinion. His Phaedra alone employed him for two years. Pardon boaſted of having finiſhed his in three months. As the ſucceſs, as the acting of a play, does not depend ſo much on the ſtile, as on the plot and the actors performance; it happened

diſcontinued. It was given the next year, and the queen received another kind of death. The play ran forty nights.

Mr. Rouſſeau ‡ who began to be zealous of the author, wrote at that time another Mariamne from Triſtan's antient tragedy; he ſent it to the players who could never act it; and to Didot the bookſeller who could never ſell it. This was the origin of the long variance that ſubſiſted between our author and Rouſſeau. Voltaire.

† This alludes to a cuſtom eſtabliſhed in France of chuſing a king by lot in every company on twelfth-night, who, on his part, names the queen. They often are at the expence of an entertainment, and both highly honoured during that night; when they drink, it is proclaimed aloud, and their example followed by all their loyal ſubjects.

‡ Not the preſent philoſopher Rouſſeau, but another of the ſame name, whoſe reputation in poetry is very high among the French. His odes are remarkable fine.

that both Phaedra's ſeemed to ſhare the ſame fate; but on the reading, their difference was eaſily perceived, and their merits were ſoon ſettled in their proper claſſes. It was to no purpoſe that Pardon publiſhed, according to all bad authors, a very inſolent preface, in which he abuſes the critics of his piece; notwithſtanding the praiſes it received from himſelf and from his cabal, it ſoon fell into that contempt which it deſerves; and had it not been for the Phaedra of Racine, it would not now be known that Pardon write one.

Yet what is the cauſe of this mighty difference between the two performances? The plot is pretty much the ſame in both plays: Phaedra expires in each; Theſeus is abſent during the two firſt acts, and ſuppoſed to have travelled to hell with Pirithous; his ſon Hypolitus is reſolved to quite Trezena, in order to ſhun Aricia whom he loves; he declares his paſſion to her, but is ſtruck with horror at Phaedra's love for him; he dies in the ſame manner, and his governor gives the ſame account of it. Beſides, the perſonages of both plays being in the ſame ſituation, talk pretty much to the ſame purport; but this is what beſt diſtinguiſhes the great man from the bad poet. The difference between Pardon and Racine is never ſo conſpicuous, as when their thoughts are moſt alike. Hypolitus's declaration to Aricia is a remarkable proof of this aſſertion. Racine makes Hypolitus ſpeak in this manner:

Moi qui contre l'amour fiérement révolté,
Aux fers de ces captifs ai long-temps inſulté;

Qui des faibles mortels déplorant les naufrages,
Penſois toujours du bord contempler les orages;
Aſſervi maintenant ſous la commune loi,
Par quel trouble maintenant me vois-je emporté
[loin de moi?
Un moment a vaincu mon audace imprudente;
Cette ame ſi ſuperbe eſt enfin dépendante.
Depuis pres de ſix mois honteux, deſeſpéré,
Portant partout le trait dont je ſuis déchiré,
Contre vous, contre moi, vainement je m'éprouve,
Préſente je vous fuis, abſente je vous trouve.
Dans le fond des forêts votre image me ſuit.
La lumiere du jour, les ombres de la nuit,
Tout retrace à mes yeux les charmes que j'évite;
Tout vous livre à l'envi le rebelle Hippolite.
Moi-même pour tout fruit de mes ſoins ſuperflus,
Maintenant je me cherche, et ne me trouve plus.
Mon arc, mes javelots, mon char, tout m'importune,
Je ne me ſouviens plus des leçons de Neptune.
Mes ſeuls gémiſſemens font retentir les bois,
Et mes courſiers oiſifs ont oublié ma voix *.

In Pardon's plays, Hypolitus expreſſes himſelf in the following manner:

Aſſez et trop long-temps, d'une bouche profane,
Je mépriſai l'amour, et j'adorai Diane;
Solitaire, farouche, on me voyoit toujours
Chaſſer dans nos forêts les lions et les ours.

* The thought and ſentiment being the ſame in theſe two ſpeeches, their whole difference lying in the expreſſion, the reader muſt allow that the attempt to convey that difference in a tranſlation would be abſurd.

Mais un ſoin plus preſſant m'occupe et m'embarraſſe ;
Depuis que je vous vois, j'abandonne la chaſſe.
Elle fit autrefois mes plaiſirs les plus doux,
Et quand j'y vais, ce n'eſt que pour penſer à vous.

It is impoſſible to compare theſe two ſpeeches without admiring the one, and laughing at the other. Yet the like thought and ſentiments run through each; for when the paſſions are to be deſcribed, nearly the ſame ideas occur to every body; but it is in the expreſſion of them that the man of genius is eaſily diſcerned from the wit, and the poet from the ſcribbler.

To attain to Mr. Racine's perfection in writing, a man muſt be poſſeſſed of his genius, and take as much pains as he did in finiſhing his works. What apprehenſions muſt I be then under, who, born with ſlender parts, and continually afflicted with diſeaſes, have neither an imagination to create many beauties, nor the liberty to correct my faults by conſtant labour and ſtudy! I am fully convinced of the many errors in the intrigue of this play, as well as in the diction. I ſhould have corrected ſome, if this edition could have been retarded; but many muſt ſtill have remained. There are certain limits in every art which we cannot go beyond. We are ſtopped by the weakneſs of our own talents. We ſpy perfection at a diſtance, and make but vain efforts to attain to it.

I ſhall not enter into any particular criticiſms upon the play now publiſhed; my readers will do it ſufficiently without my help. But I cannot avoid mentioning a general criticiſm that

has been made on the choice of the ſubject. As it is in the genius of the French to place the moſt ſerious matters in the moſt ridiculous light, they ſaid, the ſtory of this play was nothing more than "a brutiſh yet amorous old man, whoſe wife obſtinately refuſes to comply with his deſires;" and added, that domeſtic ſtrife can never be a proper ſubject for a tragedy. I beg leave to offer a few reflections on this prejudiced opinion.

All tragic pieces are founded either on the intereſts of a nation, or on the particular intereſt of princes. Of the former kind, are Iphigenia in Aulis, in which, Greece aſſembled demands the blood of the child of Agamemnon: the Horatii, where three combatants have in their hands the fate of Rome: Oedipus, where the ſafety of the Thebans depends on the diſcovery of the murder of Laius. Of the latter kind, are Britannicus, Phaedra, Mithridates, etc.

In theſe three laſt pieces the whole intereſt is confined to the family of the hero who is repreſented. The whole depends on paſſions which are equally felt by all mankind, and the intrigue is as proper for comedy as for tragedy. Change only the names, and Mithridates is but only an old man in love with a young girl, who is alſo paſſionately beloved by his two ſons; and he makes uſe of a low ſtratagem to find out which of the two is his happy rival. Phaedra is a mother-in-law, who emboldened by her confidante diſcovers her paſſion to her ſon-in-law who happens to be engaged elſewhere. Nero is an impetuous young man, who becomes enamoured on

a ſudden, reſolves immediately to get a divorce from his wife, and hides behind ſome hangings to liſten to his miſtreſs's converſation. Theſe are all ſubjects which Moliere might have handled as well as Racine. And, in fact, the intrigue of the miſer is exactly the ſame with that of Mithridates. Harpagon and the king of Pontus are two amorous old men; both have their ſons for rivals; both contrive in the ſame manner to find out the correſpondence that ſubſiſts between their ſon and miſtreſs; and both plays conclude with the marriage of the young fellows.

Moliere and Racine have equally ſucceeded in handling this ſubject: the one amuſes and diverts; the other moves us with terror and compaſſion. Moliere expoſes the ridiculous fondneſs of an old miſer: Racine deſcribes the foibles of a great king, and makes them even venerable. Let a wedding be drawn by Vateau and le Brun. One will repreſent peaſants under an arbour full of genuine and unbounded joy, at a ruſtic meal, where reign immoderate laughter, riot and drunkenneſs: the other, on the contrary, will paint the nuptials of Thetis and Peleus, the feſtivals of gods, and their majeſtic joy: and both arrive at the perfection of their art by different roads.

We may apply theſe different examples to Mariamne. The ill-humour of a wife, the fondneſs of an old huſband, the diſturbances cauſed by a ſiſter-in-law, are in themſelves of little importance, and well adapted to the comic ſcene. But a king whom all the world have

agreed to call a great man, deeply enamoured of the fineſt woman of the univerſe; the vehement paſſion of this ſovereign, ſo famous for his virtues and for his crimes, for his former cruelties, and for his preſent remorſe; this continual and rapid tranſition from love to hatred, from hatred back to love; the ambition of his ſiſter; the intrigues of his miniſters; the grievous ſituation of a princeſs whoſe beauty and virtues are ſtill celebrated in the world, who ſaw her father and her brother condemned to death by her own huſband, and to complete her misfortunes, was beloved by the murderer of her family. —— What a vaſt field? what a ſcope for a man of happier parts than I have? can ſuch a ſubject be deemed unworthy of tragedy? It is in theſe inſtances, that it can be truly ſaid, that things change their name according to the appearance they are placed in.

Of SIMPLICITY in TRAGEDY, *etc.*

ADDRESSED

To Sir EVERARD FALKENER,

An Engliſh merchant *.

Prefixed to the TRAGEDY of ZARA †.

YOU are an Engliſhman, my dear friend, and I was born in France; but all who love the arts are fellow-citizens. Thinking people have pretty much the ſame principles every where, and form but one republic. Therefore, it is no more extraordinary now-a-days, to ſee a

* Afterwards ambaſſador at Conſtantinople.

† Thoſe who love literary anecdotes will be well pleaſed to know upon what occaſion this play was wrote. Several ladies upbraided our author with not admitting love into his tragedies. He anſwered, that if ſighing heroes were abſolutely neceſſary, he alſo would introduce them on the ſtage. This piece was undertaken in conſequence of this promiſe, and finiſhed in eighteen days. It met with great ſucceſs, and is called at Paris the Chriſtian tragedy. They often act it there in the room of Corneille's Polyeuctes or Chriſtian hero.

French tragedy inſcribed to an Engliſhman or to an Italian, than it was formerly that a citizen of Epheſus or of Athens ſhould addreſs his works to a Greek of ſome other town. I offer you then, Sir, this tragedy as to my countryman in literature, and as to my intimate friend.

I take this opportunity alſo to acquaint the French nation with how much conſideration merchants are regarded in England, and the great eſteem in which is held there, a profeſſion that cauſes the grandeur of the ſtate; and with what eminence ſome among them repreſent their country in parliament, and are in the rank of legiſlators.

I know that this profeſſion is deſpiſed by ſome of our coxcombs; but *you* know alſo, that your coxcombs and ours are the moſt ridiculous animals, that proudly creep on the ſurface of the earth.

Another reaſon which induces me to talk on the Belles-Lettres with an Engliſhman, rather than with any other, is your happy liberty of thinking; which communicates itſelf to my mind, and emboldens my thoughts, when with you. The man that converſes with me, ſeems to diſpoſe of my mind: if he feels with ecſtacy, he enflames me, and if he thinks with ſtrength, my thoughts get vigour. A diſſembling courtier communicates to me his diffidence and conſtraint; but a mind free and without fear, encourages me not to cramp the progreſs of my thoughts, nor put a ſtop to the flights of my imagination; I glow with his fire. Thus a

young painter inſtructed under Coypel * and Argiliere †, ſoon makes the touches of his guides familiar to himſelf, and imperceptibly follows their ſpirit and manner in his own compoſitions. And it is on this account that Virgil made it his duty to admire Homer; he followed the path the Grecian bard had traced, and became his rival without becoming his plagiary.

Do not imagine that I ſhall make a long apology in favour of the tragedy I ſend you; I might mention why I did not give Zara a more determined vocation to Chriſtianity before ſhe knew her father; and why ſhe hides her ſecrets from her lover, etc. but wiſe minds who love to do juſtice, will eaſily ſee many reaſons without my mentioning them; and as for the critics who are reſolved not to give credit to my arguments, it would be loſt time to endeavour to ſatisfy them.

I ſhall only value myſelf on writing a piece which is tolerably ſimple, a merit to be conſidered on many accounts. This happy ſimplicity was remarkable in the learned antients. Let this novelty be introduced into your pieces; let there be greater truth, a nearer imitation of nature, and nobler images on your theatre, which is at preſent diſgraced with gibbets and legerdemain. Addiſon has already attempted it; he was the poet of the wiſe; but he was too affected; Portia and Martia, in his boaſted Cato, are

* † French painters of great reputation, eſpecially the firſt.

certainly too very insipid personages. Imitate the great Addison only in what he excels: correct the rude action of your wild Melpomene's; write for the men of taste of every place and every age, and introduce into your writings the simplicity of your manners.

I hope the English poets will not imagine I mean to offer Zara as a model to them to write from. I recommend a natural simplicity, and easy verse; and, in that, I do not at all intend my own panegyric. If Zara has met with some success, it is less owing to the goodness of the piece, than to the care I take to talk of love in the most tender and affecting manner I could. In that, I flattered the taste of my auditors, knowing the best way to succeed, is to address men's passions rather than their reason. Though good Christians we are, yet we must have love; and I am persuaded it was very happy for Corneille that he did not satisfy himself in his Polyeuctes with having the statues of Jupiter broke in peices by the Neophites; for such is the corruption of mankind, that perhaps the great soul of Polyeuctes would have made but little impression, and the christian-like lines which he repeats would have been forgot, but for his wife's passion for her pagan favourite, who, by the way, deserved her love much better than her devotee of a husband.

Such was the case of Zara. Every body that frequents plays assured me, that if she had been but merely converted, the audience would have been but little affected; but she was up to the eyes in love; and that is what has made her for-

tune. Yet I am far from having being exempt from criticisms. The most slender omissions were observed and censured. Many unmercifully insisted that I spoiled and ill-explained a very improbable tale, born in my own brain; that the subject was curtailed, and the end improper. It was foretold me, that I should be recompensed with the dreadful hissing with which the disappointed public salutes a wretched author. I laughed at their ill-founded censure, and ventured my drama on the stage; the favourable audience instead of hissing applauded; I even perceived some tears drop from the finest eyes, and moisten the most lovely cheeks. Such wished-for success did not encrease my pride, as I was conscious in myself of the many faults that still remained in Zara. I knew it impossible to write a perfect play without a contract with the d———, and that I have not made.

I dare not flatter myself that the English will do to Zara the honour they did to Brutus, of translating and acting it on the theatre of London. You have here the reputation of not being devout enough to be much concerned for the old Lusignan, nor tender enough to be affected by Zara. You pass for being better pleased with an intrigue of conspirators than with an intrigue of lovers. It is thought that on your theatre the word COUNTRY, as on ours the word LOVE, raises the highest applause; but the truth is, that you introduce love, as well as we do, in your tragedies. If you have not the reputation of being tenderly inclined, it is not, that the heroes of your theatre are not amorous, but

becauſe the manner of expreſſing their paſſion is, ſeldom natural. Our lovers ſpeak as ſuch; but, yours, as yet, ſpeak only the language of poets.

If you will allow the French to be your maſters in gallantry, there are many things in recompence which we might learn from you. It is to the Engliſh theatre that I am indebted for the boldneſs I have had to introduce on the French ſtage the names of our kings, and of the antient families of the kingdom. I think this might be the ſource of a new kind of tragedy hitherto unknown to, though neceſſary for, us. Some happy genius will probably ariſe to carry this idea to perfection, which Zara is but a ſketch of. As long as literature continues to be encouraged in France, we ſhall not want for writers of merit. Nature almoſt always forms men of every kind of talent; it only remains to protect and employ them. But if thoſe, who diſtinguiſh themſelves, are not encouraged by ſome honourable recompence, and the flattering incitement of reputation and eſteem, all the fine arts may very poſſibly decay ſometime or other in the midſt of the precautions which had been taken to maintain and ſupport them; and theſe trees, planted by Lewis the fourteenth, may degenerate through want of culture. The public will have taſte, but no great maſters will be found. The ſculptor will ſee but people of ordinary abilities in his academy *, and will not raiſe his

* There is an academy at Paris of painting and ſculpture, which has given riſe to many great maſters in both arts.

thoughts to Girardon * or to Puget †; the painter will be satisfied to think himself superior to his neighbour, and never strive to equal or excel le Pouſſin ‡. I hope the ſucceſſors of Lewis the fourteenth may follow the example of that great king, who with a look created a noble emulation among the ſeveral artiſts. He encouraged at the ſame time a Racine and a Vanrobés. He carried our commerce and our glory beyond the Indies. His favours extended to foreigners, who were ſurprized, at being known to, and recompenſed by, our court. Whatever merit was to be found, it had its protector in Lewis the fourteenth. His royal hand diſtributed honour and profit without ſolicitation or without cabals. Guillelmini §, Viviani § and the heaven-ſtudying Caſſini, were attracted at his court, and ſome great penſion would have robbed you of your Sir Iſaac Newton, if it had been poſſible to purchaſe him. Theſe were the real ſucceſſes which have done immortal honour to the name of Lewis and of France. He was the model of all Europe. It was apprehended that he aimed at univerſal monarchy, and he really obtained it by his munificence.

You do not poſſeſs monuments of the bounty of your kings equal to thoſe of ours; but your nation makes amends; with you the fa-

* † The two greateſt ſculptors France ever poſſeſſed.

‡ A celebrated French painter, whoſe compoſitions are diſtinguiſhed from thoſe of other maſters by the name of the *learned paintings of le Pouſſin.*

§ § Italian mathematicians.

nourable regards of the monarch are not neceſſary in order to recompenſe great talents of every kind. Sir Richard Steel, and Sir John Vanbrugh were at the ſame time comic authors and members of parliament. The primacy of doctor Tillotſon, the embaſſy of Mr. Prior, Sir Iſaac Newton's employment, Mr. Addiſon's ſecretaryſhip, are but the common conſequences of the regard and eſteem, in which men of ſuperior parts are held among you. They are enriched by you during their lives, and on their deceaſe, you erect them monuments and ſtatues. Even your celebrated actreſſes are placed in the churches next to your famous poets. Mrs. Bracegirdle and Mrs. Oldfield, who both ſucceeded in the great art to pleaſe, as ſoon as their courſe was over, were honourably conducted to the eternal reſting-place of all your lettered republic: while our divine Moliere, who much better deſerved ſuch honours, could hardly obtain the cold ſatisfaction of being placed in a common church-yard; and the amiable le Couvreur, whoſe eyes I cloſed, was denied the accuſtomed ceremony of a burial. This perſon, *formerly* ſo honoured and ſo much admired, was *now* through charity thrown into a hackney coach, and carried to the banks of the river Seine, where ſhe lies interred. Does not the God of love ſeem to ſtrike with anger and with horror at this relation, and breaking his arrows fly away? does not Melpomene in tears abandon and depart the ungrateful ſpot which ſhe ſo long adorned with her noble charms.

Every thing ſeems to bring back the French to that barbariſm from which we were raiſed by Lewis the fourteenth and cardinal Richelieu. Woe to the politicians who do not know the value of the fine arts! The earth is covered with nations as powerful as we are. How comes it, notwithſtanding, that we look upon almoſt all of them with little eſteem? It is for the ſame reaſon that in ſociety we deſpiſe a rich man without taſte or education. Above all things, do not imagine that this empire of the mind, this honour of being the model to other nations is a frivolous advantage. It is an infallible mark of the grandeur of an empire: it has been always under the greateſt princes, that arts have flouriſhed, and their decline has ſometimes been the epoch of that of the ſtate. Hiſtory is full of ſuch examples. But this ſubject would lead me too far: Adieu, my good friend; continue cultivating the Belles Lettres and philoſophy, without forgetting to ſend ſhips to the Mediterranean.

OF

Delicacy and Decency in Tragedy, *etc.*

In a Second Letter to Sir Everard Falkener, Ambaſſador at Conſtantinople.

Taken from the Second Edition of Zara.

MY dear friend; for your new dignity of ambaſſador renders our friendſhip only more reſpectable, and does not hinder me from making uſe of a title more ſacred than that of a public miniſter. The name of *Friend* is much ſuperior to that of *Excellence*.

I dedicate to the ambaſſador of a great king, and of a free nation, the ſame work which I dedicated to the private citizen, the Engliſh merchant.

They who know to what point commerce is honoured in your country, know alſo, that a merchant there is ſometimes a legiſlator, a good officer, a public miniſter.

Some people, depraved by the baſe cuſtom of paying homage to grandeur alone, ſtrove to throw a ridicule on the novelty of a dedication to a man who then had only merit on his ſide. They had the impudence to inſult on a ſtage

conſecrated to falſe taſte and to detraction *, the author of that dedication, and the man who received it; they had the impudence to upbraid him with being a merchant. You muſt not impute to our nation ſo great a barbarity, which the moſt unpoliſhed nations would be aſhamed of. The magiſtrates, who, among us, are entruſted with the care of our manners, and who are continually buſied in ſuppreſſing ſcandalous practices, were, on this occaſion, deceived. But the contempt and horror of the public for the known author of this baſe attempt, are freſh inſtances of the politeneſs of the French.

The virtues which adorn and form the character of a people are often contradicted by the faults of ſome particular perſons. There were ſome voluptuous men at Sparta. There are low and giddy minds in England. Athens was not extempt from taſteleſs unpoliſhed barbarians, and there are ſome ſtill to be found in Paris.

Let us forget them, as they are forgot by the public; and accept this ſecond homage. It is more naturally due to an Engliſhman, as this tragedy has been lately embelliſhed at London. It has been tranſlated and acted with ſo much ſucceſs, I have been mentioned on your ſtage with ſo much kindneſs and civility, that I owe theſe public thanks to your nation for it.

* There was a low farce acted on the Italian comic theatre at Paris, in which ſeveral perſons of merit were groſſly inſulted; and among the reſt, Sir Everard Falkener. The public treated this undertaking with all the diſlike and contempt it deſerved. Voltaire.

I cannot do more, I believe, for the honour of literature, than to relate here to my countrymen the particulars of the tranſlation and repreſentation of Zara on the theatre of London.

Mr. Hill, a man of letters, and who ſeems to underſtand the ſtage better than any other Engliſh writer, did me the honour to tranſlate the piece, with an intent to introduce on your ſcene ſome novelties both in the manner of writing tragedies and in the delivery of them. I ſhall ſpeak firſt of the acting.

The art of acting with you was ſomewhat diſtant from nature. Moſt of your tragic authors expreſſed themſelves rather as enthuſiaſtic poets than as men affected by paſſion. Several of the players puſhed this fault ſtill farther; they uſed to repeat the bombaſtic lines with a fury and vehemence that is to nature, as convulſions are to a noble and eaſy gait.

This air of forwardneſs is quite foreign to your nation, which is naturally reſerved; and this reſervedneſs is ſometimes taken for coldneſs by foreigners. Your preachers never take upon them the manner of orators; and a lawyer would be laughed at in Weſtminſter-hall, who ſhould grow warm in his client's cauſe. Your actors alone were allowed to rant. Our Paris actors and eſpecially our actreſſes were guilty of this fault ſome years ago: it was mademoiſelle le Couvreur that corrected them. This ſame change which mademoiſelle le Couvreur brought about on our ſcene, Mrs. Cibber has juſt introduced on yours in the part of Zara. Strange!

that in all the arts it muſt be after much loſt time that we come at laſt to what is natural and ſimple. Another novelty, which will be more ſurpriſing to the French, is, that an Engliſh gentleman of fortune was not above acting on your theatre the part of Oſman *. It was in-

* It was eaſy, ſays Mr. Hill, to induce Oſman (as he is a relation of my own, and but too fond of the amuſement) to make trial, how far his delight, in an art I ſhall never allow him to practiſe, might enable him to ſupply one part of the proof, that, to imitate nature, we muſt proceed upon natural principles. At the ſame time, it happened that Mrs. Cibber was, fortunately, inclinable to exert her inimitable talent, in additional aid of my purpoſe, with view to continue the practice of a profeſſion, for which, her perſon, her voice, the unaffected ſenſibility of her heart, and her face, ſo finely diſpoſed for aſſuming and expreſſing the paſſions, have ſo naturally qualified her. Preface to the Engliſh tragedy of Zara.

Theatrical performances have, indeed, often been exhibited entirely by perſons of the *firſt* faſhion, and with ſucceſs; but in theſe repreſentations, the apparatus of a regular theatre has been wanting, and the whole has been greatly hurt by that deficiency. The preſent age, perhaps, is the firſt, that ever produced ſo rare an incident as a play performed on the *public ſtage*, by perſons of diſtinction. A ſet of gentlemen celebrated for their taſte, and ſpirit in gallantry, who were determined to give their acquaintance an uncommon entertainment, and to do it in an uncommon manner, performed the tragedy of Othello, March 7, 1751, at Drury-Lane theatre. The character of Othello was played by the elder Mr. Delaval; Iago and Caſſio by the ſecond Mr. Delaval and a younger brother; Deſdemona by Mrs. Quon; Roderigo by captain Stevens; Æmilia by that gen*tleman's* lady; Lodovico by Mr. Pine. They hired

tereſting enough to ſee the two principal perſonages repreſented, one by a man of rank, and the other by a young actreſs of eighteen who had never repeated a line in her life.

This example of a gentleman who has publicly made uſe of his abilities in acting, is not the firſt among you. The only thing that is odd, is, that we ſhould be ſurprized at it. We ſhould remember that every thing in this world depends on cuſtom and opinion. The French court have danced on the ſtage with the actors of the opera, and it has only been wondered at, why this ſort of amuſement has been diſcontinued. Why ſhould it appear more ſurpriſing to act, than to dance in public? Is there any other difference between theſe two arts, except that the firſt is as much above the laſt, as the talents of the mind are ſuperior to thoſe of the body. I ſtill repeat it, and I ſhall always think, that none of the fine arts are deſpicable, and what is real-

the theatre for the night; they gave among their friends as many tickets as would fill it; and exhibited their performance with all the pomp and decoration of the moſt regular concerted entertainment of the kind. The royal family did them the honour of filling the ſtage boxes, and every corner of the houſe ſhone with diamonds and embroidery. The tickets expreſſed no particular place, ſo that thoſe only that came firſt had the advantage of the beſt ſeats: by this means the whole houſe was filled with equally good company; and ſtars glittered for the firſt, and probably the laſt, time in the ſhilling gallery. The dreſſes, and expence of the houſe, which was generally one hundred and fifty pounds, amounted to above one thouſand.

ly ignominious, is, to throw ignominy on any talent.

Let us come now to the tranſlation of Zara, and to the change that has been lately made on your ſtage, in the art of dramatic poetry.

A cuſtom prevailed among you, to which even Mr. Addiſon ſubjected himſelf, though the wiſeſt of your writers; ſo much does cuſtom take place of reaſon and of law! It conſiſted in finiſhing every act with verſes of a different nature from the reſt of the play, and theſe verſes neceſſarily contained a ſimile. Phaedra, leaving the ſtage, poetically compares herſelf to a hind; Cato to a rock; Cleopatra to infants, who cry till they are lulled aſleep.

The tranſlator of Zara is the firſt, who dared maintain the right of nature againſt a taſte ſo foreign to it.

He baniſhed this unreaſonable cuſtom, perſuaded that the language of paſſion ſhould be natural, and that the hero, not the poet, ſhould be conſtantly ſeen by the ſpectators.

It is from this principle, that he has tranſlated in a plain and unaffected ſtile, all theſe ſimple verſes of the original, which would have been ſpoiled by an attempt to make them ſhine with brilliancy of wit or fancy; ſuch are the following lines:

Joys, which we do not know, we do not wiſh;

Born beyond Ganges, I had been a Pagan;
In France, a Chriſtian; —I am, here, a Saracen:

But Oſman lov'd me —— and I've loſt it all.

I talk not of a ſceptre, which he gives me:
No —— to be charm'd with that, were thanks,
too humble!
Offenſive tribute, and, too poor, for love!

I ſhould believe, you hated, had you power
To love, with moderation.

—— Art was made
For Zara; —— Art, however innocent,
Looks like deceiving:

All theſe lines are tranſlated word for word. It would not have been difficult to ſet them off; but the tranſlator differed in this point from ſome of my countrymen. He choſe, and he rendered into his own tongue, all the native ſimplicity of theſe verſes. And indeed the ſtile muſt be always adapted to the ſubject. Alzira, Brutus, and Zara required, for example, three different ſorts of verſification.

If Berenice complained of Titus, and Ariadne of Theſeus, in the ſtile of Cinna; Berenice and Ariadne would not affect the audience.

Love will never be expreſſed, if other beauties are deſired than nature and truth.

The queſtion is not here to be determined, whether we ſhould admit ſo much love in our dramatic performances? I agree that it is a fault; but it is, and it ever will be, an univer-

fal one; and I do not know what name to give to faults that charm mankind.

One thing certain is, that in this defect, (if it may be ſo called) the French have ſucceeded better than all other nations, antient or modern. Love appears on our ſtage with a decency, a truth, a delicacy, that is not to be found elſewhere; the reaſon of it is, the French nation has made greater progreſs than any other in the knowlege of ſociety.

The conſtant intercourſe held up with livelineſs and civility between the two ſexes, has introduced in France a politeneſs leſs known elſewhere.

Society depends upon the women. Every people, unhappy enough to confine them, is unſociable. Your manners which were yet auſtere, your political quarrels, and religious wars, deprived you, till the reign of Charles the ſecond, of the ſweets of ſociety even in the midſt of liberty. Your poets therefore could not be acquainted with the manner in which love is treated by people of delicacy and refinement.

Good comedy was unknown before Moliere appeared, as the art of expreſſing true delicate ſentiments, was unknown until Racine began to write; becauſe ſociety was not till then in its higheſt perfection. A poet in his cloſet cannot paint thoſe manners which he has not ſeen; it is eaſier to write an hundred odes, or an hundred epiſtles, than one ſcene in which nature is to ſpeak.

Your Dryden, who was really a great genius, yet puts conſtantly in the mouth of his amorous

heroes, either by hyperboles or rhetoric, or indecent expreſſions, both equally contrary to real tenderneſs.

Racine makes Titus ſay:

Depuis cinq ans entiers chaque jour je la vois;
Et crois tojours la voir pour la premiere fois.

For five long years I've ſeen her every day;
And yet I think the laſt, the firſt I ſee her.

But your Dryden goes ſtill farther, and makes Antony expreſs his paſſion in the following manner.

How I loved
Witneſs, ye days and nights, and all ye hours,
That danc'd away with down upon your feet,
As all your buſ'neſs were to count my paſſion.
One day paſt by, and nothing ſaw but love;
Another came, and ſtill 'twas only love:
The ſuns were weary'd out with looking on,
And I untir'd with loving.

It is difficult to imagine that Antony did really hold ſuch a diſcourſe to Cleopatra. In the ſame piece Cleopatra thus ſpeaks to Marc Antony:

Come to me, come, my ſoldier, to my arms,
You've been too long away from my embraces;
But, when I have you faſt, and all my own,
With broken murmurs, and with am'rous ſighs,

I'll ſay you were unkind, and puniſh you,
And mark you red with many an eager kiſs.

It is extremely probable that Cleopatra often talked in this manner: but ſuch indecencies ought not to be preſented to a reſpectable audience.

It is in vain that ſome of your country-men will cry out, "This is nature:" They are to be anſwered, that this ſtate of nature is the very thing we muſt veil with care. It does not even ſhew a knowlege of the human heart to imagine that the method to pleaſe, is to introduce ſuch licentious imagery. On the contrary, it excludes true delight from the ſoul. When every thing is ſeen at the firſt glance, one is immediately ſatisfied.

As there remains nothing more to ſeek for or deſire, we become languid where we thought to arrive at the height of joy. And in the purſuit of the contrary method, polite people enjoy a variety of pleaſures, of which the groſſer part of mankind have not the leaſt conception.

The ſpectators in the former caſe are like lovers, whom a too ready compliance with their deſires, diſguſts. The greateſt caution muſt be uſed in covering thoſe ideas, which would raiſe a bluſh, if preſented in an open manner. It is this veil in which conſiſt the pleaſures of delicacy; they feel none, where decency is not preſerved.

The French have introduced this rule before other nations, not becauſe they are void of genius and courage to undertake, as the unequal and impetuous Dryden ridiculouſly pretends, but

becauſe ſince the regency of Anne of Auſtria, they have been the moſt ſociable and poliſhed people of the earth: and this politeneſs is not a meer arbitrary cuſtom, like what we call civility; it is a law of nature that they happily have cultivated more than the reſt of mankind. The tranſlator of *Zara* has generally reſpected theſe theatrical decencies, which ought to be as common to you as to us; but in ſome inſtances he has yet followed antient prejudice.

For example, in the Engliſh tranſlation when Oſman declares to Zara, that his love for her is gone, ſhe anſwers by throwing herſelf on the ground. The ſultan is not affected at ſeeing her in this poſture of ridicule and of deſpair, yet the next moment he is ſtruck at ſeeing her ſhed tears, and ſays:

Zara! you weep!

He ſhould have rather ſaid before,

Zara! you throw yourſelf upon the ground!

And indeed theſe words, Zara! you weep! which had a very great effect on our theatre, were productive of none on yours, becauſe they were there miſplaced. Theſe familiar, ſimple expreſſions, derive their whole force from the manner in which they are introduced. "You change colour, my lord," is very little when conſidered by itſelf, and yet, the moment theſe ſimple words are pronounced in Racine's Mithridates, every ſpectator is ſtruck with terror.

To ſay nothing but what is proper to be
and that too in the proper manner, is a mer
which the French, myſelf excepted, ſeem to
nearer attained, than the writers of other
tries. It is relative to this art, that our nati
think, deſerves to be believed. You rea
things of greater uſe and importance. It
be ſhameful in us not to allow it. The Fr
who have wrote againſt Sir Iſaac Newton's
veries in optics, now are ſorry for it.
thoſe who are ſtill enemies to his ſyſtem o
traction, muſt ſoon alſo acknowlege their
You ought to agree to the rules of our th
as we ought to embrace your philoſophy.
have made as good experiments on the h
heart, as you have made in natural philoſ
The art to pleaſe ſeems appropriated to
French, as the art of thinking belongs to
Engliſh. Happy the man, who like you,
unites both, etc.

OF THE

ADVANTAGE of LITERATURE to LADIES of QUALITY.

In a letter to the Marchioneſs du CHASTELET, on ſending her the Tragedy of ALZIRA.

MADAM,

IT is paying you but a poor tribute, to lay at your feet a poetic performance, which flouriſhes but a moment, whoſe merit conſiſts in the tranſitory indulgence of the public, and the illuſion of the theatre; afterwards doomed to mix in the croud, and be forgot.

What is, in fact, a novel put into action and verſe, in the eyes of a perſon who reads the works of geometricians with the ſame eaſe that others read romances? what is it to her, who has found in Locke, the ſage preceptor of mankind, her own ſentiments, and the hiſtory of her own thoughts; and who, born to partake of the delights of the world, yet prefers truth to every thing? But, madam, the greateſt genius, and certainly the moſt deſirable, is that,

which excludes none of the fine arts. They all are the nouriſhment and the pleaſure of the mind: is there therefore any which we ſhould not cultivate and approve? Happy the mind that is not parched up with the ſtudy of philoſophy, nor enervated by the charms of the Belles-Lettres; which can be ſtrengthened by Locke, inſtructed by Clarke and Newton, elevated by the reading of Cicero and of Boſſuet *, and adorned by the beauties of Virgil and of Taſſo.

Such, madam, is your genius; I muſt not fear to ſay it, though you dread to hear it. Your example muſt encourage perſons of your ſex and rank to think, that they may be ſtill more ennobled by improving their reaſon, and that wit is an ornament to them. There was a time in France, and even all over Europe, when gentlemen thought it beneath their dignity, and women thought it beyond their ſphere, to ſeek for knowlege. The firſt looking on themſelves as born for war or for idleneſs, and the latter for dreſs and coquetry. The ridicule which even Moliere and Boileau threw on learned women, ſeemed, in a poliſhed age, to juſtify the prejudices of barbariſm.

But Moliere, that legiſlator in the morals and decencies of the world, certainly did not pretend, when he expoſed female pedantry, to laugh at wit or learning. He only attacks the

* A French biſhop, famous for his great eloquence, genius, and learning, as well as for his controverſy with the Proteſtants of France, and his diſputes with his brother biſhop Fenelon, author of Telemachus.

abuſe and affectation of them; as in his Tartuffe, he attacks hypocriſy but not virtue. Inſtead of writing a ſatire againſt women, if the exact, the ſolid, the laborious, the elegant Boileau, had conſulted ſome of the moſt ingenious ladies at court, he would have added to the art and merit of his works, ſome flowers and graces, which would have given them ſtill greater charms. In vain has he ſtrove, in his ſatire againſt women, to ridicule a lady of rank who had learned aſtronomy. He would have done better to have learned it himſelf. Philoſophic genius has made ſo great a progreſs in France theſe forty years paſt, that, if Boileau were ſtill alive, he, who took upon him to ridicule a woman of faſhion, becauſe ſhe converſed privately with Roberval and Sauveur *, would be obliged to reſpect and imitate thoſe, who profit publicly of the knowlege of the Maupertuis †, the Reaumurs ‡, the Mairans §,

* Two excellent mathematicians in the time of Lewis the XIVth.

† Well known for his great knowlege in the mathematics, as well as of the belles-lettres; for his journey to Lapland, to meaſure a meridian of the earth; and for having been a great favourite of the preſent king of Pruſſia, as well as preſident of his academy at Berlin. He died in the year 1758.

‡ One of the moſt diligent and accurate obſervers of nature in its minuteſt operations. His hiſtory of inſects is a complete work. He improved and perfected the Egyptian method of hatching of eggs, by the means of artificial heat, or fire. He died in the year 1756.

§ A very ingenious philoſopher and polite writer. He has been ſecretary to the academy of ſciences of Paris.

the Dufays *, the Clairauts †; thoſe truly learned men, whoſe object is uſeful ſcience, and, who, by making it agreeable, render it by degrees really neceſſary to our nation. We are arrived at the period, I dare ſay it, in which a poet muſt be a philoſopher, and in which a woman may be one publicly.

In the beginning of the laſt age, the French learned the arrangement of *words*. The age of *things* is now arrived. She who read formerly Montaigne, Aſtraea, and the tales of the queen of Navarre, was reckoned learned. The Deſhoulieres ‡ and the Daciers §, both famous in their way, have ſince flouriſhed. But your ſex has derived ſtill greater honour from thoſe whom Fontenelle thought worthy to write hisplurality of worlds for, and Algarotti his dialogues on light, a work perhaps equal to the firſt. It is true, a woman, who abandons the duties of her condition, to cultivate the ſciences, is culpable even in her ſucceſſes; but, madam, the ſame diſpoſi-

* An excellent botaniſt and chemiſt, director of the royal garden of plants at Paris, and member of the academy of ſciences.

† One of the greateſt mathematicians and aſtronomers of the preſent age. His calculations of the motion of the moon, are much eſteemed, as well as thoſe relative to the return of the comets.

‡ A moſt amiable female poet; her works are full of that wit and delicacy peculiar to the ſex

§ A lady remarkable for her knowlege and fondneſs for the Greek, from which ſhe tranſlated ſeveral books. Her huſband was as great a Grecian as ſhe was; and indeed they became the two greateſt pedants of the laſt age.

tion of mind which guides to the knowlege of truth, leads us alſo to the fulfilling of our duty.

The queen of England, conſort to George the ſecond, who became mediatreſs between the two greateſt metaphyſicians of Europe, Clarke and Leibnitz, and who was able to judge their differences, yet did not neglect a moment the cares of a queen, a wife, or a mother.

Chriſtina of Sweden, who quitted a throne for the fine arts, was ranked among the greateſt princes while ſhe reigned. Does not the grand-daughter of the great * Condé, in whom her grandfather's genius is revived, add a new luſtre to the blood from which ſhe is ſprung?

You, madam, whoſe name may be mentioned with that of princes, do learning the ſame honour. You cultivate all the branches of literature. They are your occupation in the age of gaiety and pleaſure, and yet you hide this merit, foreign to the world, with as much care as you have acquired it. Continue, madam, to cherish, to dare to cultivate the ſciences, though this light, long incloſed in your own breaſt, has at laſt ſpread itſelf abroad, notwithſtanding all

* So is called in France the prince of Condé, who, in the beginning of Lewis the fourteenth's reign, won three battles before he was eighteen years of age. He afterwards quitted the king, who was his couſin, to join the Pariſians that had revolted, but was beat by Turenne, and obliged to fly to Spain, by whoſe mediation Lewis forgave, but never forgot, his couſin's riſing in rebellion againſt him. His grand-daughter here-mentioned, was the late ducheſs of Maine.

the efforts you made to keep it ſecret. Should they who have long in private diſtributed their bounties, renounce that virtue, becauſe it is become publicly known?

And why bluſh for one's merit? A cultivated mind is an additional beauty. It is another empire. The protection of ſovereigns is ſought for the arts. Is not that of beauty ſtill ſuperior?

Give me leave to add, that another reaſon for eſteeming women who cultivate their minds, is, that their taſte alone determines them to do ſo. They only ſeek for new entertainment, and ſo far they are praiſe-worthy.

As for us men, it is often through vanity, and ſometimes through intereſt, that we ſpend our days in the ſtudy of the arts. We make them the inſtruments of our fortune; it is a kind of profanation. I am ſorry that Horace ſays of himſelf,

Bold fortune edg'd, and want inſpir'd my muſe. *
Francis's tranſlation.

The ruſt of envy, the artifice of intrigues, the poiſon of calumny, the aſſaſſination of ſatire, (if I may make uſe of ſuch a phraſe) diſhonour, among men, a profeſſion which, in itſelf, has ſomething really divine.

For my part, who, from my infancy, was determined to the arts by an irreſiſtable propenſion, I began early to revolve theſe words, which

* ——— Paupertas impulit audax
Ut verſus facerem. ———

e often repeated to you, from Cicero, that
r of his country, of liberty, and of elo-
ce. " Learning forms youth, and charms
ıge. It is an ornament to us in proſperity,
in adverſity a comfort. It accompanies us
me or abroad, in company or in ſolitude;
n every place, in every ſtage of life, it con-
tes to our happineſs."
have always loved literature for itſelf;
now, madam, I cultivate it for you, to
ve, if poſſible, the happineſs of paſſing
emainder of my days near you, in the
t of retirement, of peace, and, perhaps, of
ı; to which you ſacrifice in your youth
alſe, but enchanting pleaſures of the world;
word, to be able to ſay one day with Lu-
us that poetical philoſopher, whoſe beauties
errors are ſo well known to you,

ove all 'tis pleaſanteſt to get
ıe top of high philoſophy, and ſit
ı the calm, peaceful, flouriſhing head of it;
hence we may view, deep, wond'rous deep below,
ow poor miſtaken mortals wand'ring go,
eking the path to happineſs; ſome aim
: learning, wit, nobility, or fame;
hers, with cares and dangers vex each hour,
o reach the top of wealth and ſovereign power.
ind, wretched man! * Creech's tranſlation.

ſhall add nothing to this long epiſtle re-
e to the tragedy which I have done myſelf

d nil dulcius eſt, benè quam munita tenere
lita doctrina Sapientum Templa ſerena,

the honour to dedicate to you. How is it poſſible, madam, to ſpeak of it, after ſpeaking of you! All I can ſay, is, that I wrote it at your houſe, and under your directions. I ſtrove to render it leſs unworthy of you, by introducing into it, novelty, truth, and virtue. I have endeavoured to delineate that generous ſentiment, that humane diſpoſition, of ſoul, which does good to all men, and forgives their offences; theſe ſentiments ſo ſtrongly recommended by the ſages of antiquity, and ſo much refined in our religion, theſe real laws of nature which have been always ſo little obſerved. You have corrected many faults in this performance, and you are conſcious of the imperfections that ſtill remain. May the public, the more ſevere to me, as it has been already the more indulgent, excuſe theſe imperfections as you have done!

May at leaſt this homage which I pay you, madam, laſt longer than my other writings! It would be immortal if it were worthy of the perſon to whom it is addreſſed.

I am with profound reſpect,
Madam,
Your moſt obedient, and
Moſt humble Servant,

DE VOLTAIRE.

Deſpicere unde queas alios, paſſimque videre,
Errare, atque viam palantus quærere vitæ,
Certare ingenio, contendere nobilitate,
Noctes atque dies niti præſtante labore,
Ad ſummas emergere opes, rerumque potiri,
O miſeras hominum mentes! O pectora cæca!

Of ENVY that attends MERIT and SUCCESS in LITERATURE.

In a Preliminary Diſcourſe to the Tragedy of ALZIRA.

THE author has endeavoured, in the following tragedy, which is of pure invention, and wrote in a new manner, to ſhew how much the true ſpirit of religion is ſuperior to the virtues of nature. The religion of a barbarian conſiſts in offering to his gods the blood of his enemies. A Chriſtian, ill inſtructed, is often as unjuſt: to be a ſtrict obſerver of uſeleſs ceremonies, and negligent of the whole duties of man; to repeat certain prayers, and preſerve his vices; to faſt, but continue to hate, to cabal, to perſecute; ſuch is his religion.* That of a true chriſtian commands him to look upon all men as his brethren, to do them all the good he can, and to pardon them when they offer him an injury.

Such is Guſman† at the hour of his death; ſuch is Alvarez ‡ in the whole courſe of his life;

* It is obvious that monſieur de Voltaire, in this paſſage, alludes particularly to the Roman-catholic religion.

† ‡ Characters in Alzira, one of Monſieur de Voltaire's fineſt tragedies.

ſuch have I repreſented Henry the fourth, even in the midſt of his weakneſſes. Moſt of my writings reſpire this humane diſpoſition, which ſhould be the chief character of a thinking being. They all ſhew, if I may ſo expreſs myſelf, the deſire of the happineſs of mankind, the horror of injuſtice and of oppreſſion; and it is this alone, which has reſcued my writings from that oblivion, to which their many faults naturally condemned them. It is on this account that the Henriade * has held up againſt the repeated efforts of ſome zealous Frenchmen, who were abſolutely reſolved that France ſhould not produce an epic poem.

There are always a few readers who ſuffer not their judgment to be biaſſed by the venom of cabal or intrigues, who love truth, and who look for the man in the author. Such are the perſons in whom I met with favour. To ſuch I offer the following reflections; I hope they will forgive the neceſſity I am under to publiſh them.

A foreigner one day in Paris expreſſed his ſurpriſe at the load of libels which continually appeared in public, and the cruel outrages that were daily levelled againſt one man. It is probable, ſays he, this is ſome ambitious perſon, who would fain poſſeſs himſelf of one of thoſe em-

* An epic poem, wrote by monſieur de Voltaire when he was confined in the Baſtile. It is compared by many French and foreign readers, to the beſt poems of antiquity, and by a few it is thought ſuperior to any.

ployments which ſtir up the common deſires and envy of mankind. No, it was anſwered him, he is an obſcure ſubject, retired from the world, who lives more with Virgil and Locke, than with his countrymen, and whoſe face is as little known to ſome of his enemies, as to the man who pretended to engrave his picture. He is author of ſome pieces which have forced tears from your eyes; and of ſome other works, in which, notwithſtanding their many defects, one is pleaſed with that ſpirit of humanity, of juſtice, and of liberty, which runs through them all. Thoſe who calumniate him, are men that pretend to diſpute with him for a little ſmoke, and who will perſecute him while he lives, for no other reaſon, but for the pleaſure he has given you. The foreigner felt ſome indignation againſt the oppreſſors, and ſome good-will towards the injured author.

I think it hard, I muſt own, not to obtain from one's cotemporaries and countrymen, what may be expected from foreigners, and from poſterity. It is cruel, it is diſgraceful to human nature, that literature ſhould be tainted with theſe perſonal animoſities, theſe cabals and intrigues, which ſhould be confined to the ſlaves of fortune. What do authors gain by reviling each other? They diſhonour a profeſſion which it was in their power to render reſpectable. Muſt the art of thinking, man's beſt attribute, become the ſource of ridicule; and men of parts, who have made themſelves, by their quarrels, the ſport of fools, be the jeſt of a public, when they ought to have been their maſters?

Virgil, Varius, Pollio, Horace, Tibullus, were intimate; the monuments of their friendſhip ſubſiſt to this day, and will ever ſhew that ſuperior minds ſhould be united together. If we cannot attain to the excellency of their genius, cannot we poſſeſs their virtues? Theſe men, on whom the eyes of the univerſe were fixed, who had to diſpute among them the admiration of Aſia, Africa, and Europe, yet loved each other, and lived like brothers; and we, who are confined on a narrow theatre, whoſe names, ſcarce known in one corner of the world, are as tranſient as our faſhions; we cruelly attack each other for a flaſh of reputation, which, beyond our little horizon, ſtrikes the eyes of none.

We live in a time of famine, we have but little, and we tear one another aſunder for it. Virgil and Horace, who lived in a time of plenty, diſputed nothing.

A book has been wrote *de morbis artificum*, of the diſeaſes of artiſts. The moſt incurable of all is this meanneſs and jealouſy. But what is ſhameful, is, that intereſt is generally the motive of theſe little ſatirical libels which are publiſhed every day. Not long ago, a man, who had wrote ſome low pamphlets againſt his friend and benefactor, was aſked what puſhed him to that exceſs of ingratitude? he anſwered coldly, *I muſt do ſomething to live* *. Whatever is the ſource of theſe outrages, it it certain that a man,

* It was the abbot Guyot des Fontaines who made that anſwer to the comte d'Argenſon, afterwards ſecretary of ſtate. *Voltaire*.

whoſe writings are attacked, ſhould never reply; for, if the criticiſms are good, he has nothing to do but to correct his faults; and if they are ill-founded, they fall of courſe. Let us remember Bocalini's fable: "A traveller, ſays he, was ſo peſtered with the noiſe of graſhoppers in his ears, that he alighted from his horſe in great wrath to kill them all. He gave himſelf much trouble and did not ſucceed: but had he purſued his journey without taking notice of them, the troubleſome inſects would have died in a week's time, and he would have ſuffered nothing from them."

The author muſt always forget himſelf; but the man never. *Se ipſum deſerere turpiſſimum eſt.* Thoſe, indeed, who want parts to criticiſe our writings, are apt to throw out aſperſions againſt our perſons; but though ſhameful it is to anſwer ſuch, yet it ſometimes may be more ſo, not to make any anſwer.

I have been treated in twenty libels as a man without religion; and one of the grand proofs alledged in favour of this aſſertion, is, that in Oedipus, Jocaſta ſays theſe lines:

Les pretres ne ſont pas ce qu'un vain peuple penſe.
Notre credulité fait toute leur ſcience.

Prieſts are very different from what they appear to be to the ignorant vulgar. Our credulity is the ſource of all their knowlege.

Thoſe who reproached me in this manner, were full as reaſonable as theſe who declared

that the Henriade *ſmelt ſtrongly of the ſemipelagian hereſy.*

This accuſation of irreligion is often renewed, becauſe it is the ſlanderer's laſt reſource. What anſwer ſhall I make, what comfort can I have, except in the rememberance of the number of great men from Socrates down to Deſcartes, who have undergone the ſame falſe imputations? I ſhall only aſk one queſtion; Who has moſt religion, the calumniator who perſecutes, or the accuſed who forgives?

Theſe libels treat me alſo as a perſon jealous of the reputation of other men; I know envy only by what I have ſuffered from it. I have baniſhed ſatire from my pen, and it is impoſſible for my heart to be envious.

I appeal to the author of *Radamiſtus* * and of *Electra* †, whoſe dramatic works firſt raiſed in me a deſire of entering the ſame career. His ſucceſſes have never coſt me any other tears but thoſe, that terror and pity drew from my eyes at the repreſentation of his plays. He knows he never inſpired me but with emulation and friendſhip ‡.

* † Monſieur Crebillon. It is the ſon of this gentleman who at preſent is ſo much admired for his romances; in which the vices and follies of the French nobility are ſo ſtrongly ridiculed.

‡ The effects of this emulation are looked upon by ſeveral people in France, as marks of envy towards Crebillon. To prove the truth of this accuſation, they obſerve, that M. de Voltaire has often affected to treat the ſame ſubjects which had been before handled by Crebillon; ſuch as Semiramis, Electra,

I can ſay with confidence as with truth, that I am more zealous for the liberal arts, than for my own writings. Exceſſively ſtruck, from my very infancy, with every thing that bears the character of genius, I look upon a great poet, a good muſician, an eminent painter, an able ſculptor, (if he is an honeſt man) as a perſon I am bound to cheriſh, as a brother the arts have given me. Young men, whoſe minds are turned for literature, will find in me a friend; ſeveral have found a father. Theſe are my ſentiments; and they who have lived with me, know I entertain no others.

I thought myſelf obliged to addreſs the public, for once in my life, in my own behalf. As to my tragedy, I ſhall ſay nothing about it. Confuting criticiſms is a vain ſelf-love, which we ſhould get the better of; but confounding calumny is a duty we are bound to perform. I

Catalina, in order to ſhew the ſuperiority he was conſcious he had over him. And indeed in theſe attempts, monſieur de Voltaire has ſucceeded to his wiſhes.

A DEFENCE of the Tragedy of MAHOMET, againſt the Charge of encouraging Fanaticiſm.

In an AVERTISEMENT prefixed to the Tragedy of MAHOMET, of the year 1743*.

I Thought it would be doing ſome ſervice to the lovers of the belles-lettres, to publiſh the tragedy of Mahomet, which has been ſo much diſfigured in France, in two ſpurious editions. I am certain the author wrote it in the year 1736, and ſent it at that time to the prince royal, ſince king of Pruſſia, who was cultivating literature with ſurpriſing ſucceſs, and who ſtill makes it his chief amuſement.

I was in the city of Lille in the year 1741, when M. de Voltaire arrived there to ſpend a few days. There was then in that town the beſt company of players that ever appeared in the provinces. They repreſented this piece in a manner that ſatisfied a very numerous aſſembly; the governor and the intendant of the province went to ſee it ſeveral times. Every body thought

* This piece, in the original, is called *The publiſher's advertiſement*.

it wrote in ſo new a taſte, and the ſubject, ſo very delicate in itſelf, handled with ſuch wiſdom and prudence, that ſeveral prelates reſolved to ſee it acted by the ſame players in a private houſe. Their opinion agreed with that of the public. The author was alſo happy enough to get his manuſcript conveyed into the hands of one of the firſt men of Europe, and of the church *, who ſupports with vigour the weight of public affairs, and who judges of literary works, with a true refined taſte at an age to which few people arrive, and at which, fewer ſtill, preſerve their wit and delicacy. He ſaid the piece was wrote with all requiſite circumſpection, that the dangers of the ſubject could not poſſibly be more wiſely avoided, but, as for the poetry, it was capable of ſome corrections. In conſequence the author has ſince made ſeveral amendments to his play. This was alſo the opinion of another perſon, equal in rank and learning to the firſt.

In fine, the tragedy approved of, beſides, in the ordinary forms, was repreſented in Paris, the ninth of Auguſt, 1742. There was an entire box full of the chief magiſtrates of that town; ſome public miniſters were alſo preſent. They all thought of it as the perſons I have already mentioned.

Others, however, differed from the general determinations. Whether, in the rapidity of the repreſentation, they had not cloſely enough followed the thread of the piece, or, that they

* Suppoſed to be cardinal Fleury.

were not accuſtomed to the theatre, they were offended at Mahomet's ordering a murder, and making uſe of his religion to encourage to aſſaſſination, a young man whom he choſe for the inſtrument of his crime. Theſe perſons, ſtruck with the heinouſneſs of ſuch an act, did not reflect that it is conſidered in the piece as the moſt horrible of all crimes, and that, even, it is morally impoſſible to conſider it in any other light. In a word, they only ſaw one ſide of the queſtion, which is the moſt general ſource of our miſtakes. They are certainly in the right to be alarmed, in conſidering only this ſide with which they were offended. A little more attention would have eaſily changed their minds. But in the firſt heat of their zeal, they ſaid the piece was of a very dangerous tendency, fit to produce Clements * and Ravaillacs †.

This opinion is indeed very ſtrange, and has probably been retracted by thoſe perſons who firſt formed it. It is as much as to ſay, that Hermione encourages people to murder kings; Electra, to kill a mother; or, Cleopatra and Medea, one's children. It is ſaying that Harpagon forms miſers; the Gameſter, gameſters; Tartuffe, hypocrites. The injuſtice, even againſt Mahomet, would be greater than againſt any of theſe other plays, for the crime of the falſe prophet is ſet in a much more odious light than any of the vices or irregularities which theſe other

* † Two religious aſſaſſins, the firſt, of *Henry the third;* and the ſecond, of *Henry the fourth;* kings of France.

pieces repreſent. It was preciſely againſt the Ravaillacs and the Clements, this play was wrote, which made a very ingenious man ſay, that, if it had been compoſed in the time of *Henry the third* and *Henry the fourth*, it would have preſerved their lives. Can ſuch a reproach be made with any confidence to the author of the Henriade? He, who has ſo often employed his pen in that poem, and elſewhere, not only againſt ſuch wicked attempts, but even againſt every maxim that might have any ſuch dangerous tendency.

I muſt own, the more I read the works of this author, the more they ſeem to me to be characteriſed by a love for the public good; above all, he inſpires on every occaſion, the greateſt horror of the violences of rebellion, of perſecution and fanaticiſm. Is there any virtuous man or good ſubject, who does not adopt all the maxims of the Henriade? does not this poem create in us a love for true virtue?

Mahomet ſeems to me to be wrote in the ſame ſpirit, and I dare ſay its greateſt enemies will now allow it.

He ſoon ſaw that a dangerous cabal was forming againſt him. The moſt violent had ſpoken to perſons in power, who, not having ſeen it acted, were obliged to truſt to the accounts of others. The celebrated Moliere, the glory of France, was in the ſame ſituation, upon his Tartuffe's being acted *; he had recourſe di-

* As ſoon as this comedy was acted, the prieſts and devotees joined in an uproar againſt it, ſaying, it was cultivated to ſatiriſe and ridicule religion and

rectly to Lewis the great, to whom he was known, and by whom he was beloved. The authority of this monarch ſoon diſſipated the ſiniſter interpretations that were given of this comedy. But times are altered; the protection granted to arts entirely new, cannot be always continued; beſides, one artiſt has an opportunity of obtaining with eaſe, what another cannot have without great difficulty. Other diſcuſſions, a new examination became neceſſary. The author thought it beſt to take back his tragedy himſelf, after the third repreſentation, until time ſhould appeaſe prejudiced minds, which cannot fail happening in a nation ſo ingenious and ſo learned as the French. It was mentioned in the public papers, that the tragedy of Mahomet had been prohibited by the government. I can poſitively aſſert that nothing can be falſer. Not only, the leaſt order was never given on that head, but the firſt perſons of the ſtate did not vary an inſtant in the opinion they had entertained from the beginning, of the diſcretion and prudence with which the ſubject was treated.

Some people having haſtily copied ſeveral ſcenes during the repreſentations, and having obtained from the actors a part or two, preſumed to give the clandeſtine editions which have hi-

devotion; though the perſonage attacked in the play, is ſuppoſed only to wear the maſk of both. Moliere, by being valet de chambre to Lewis the fourteenth, and very well known to him, ſaved himſelf from the diſgrace ſuch powerful enemies *threatened* him with.

therto appeared. It is eaſy to perceive how very much they differ from the work itſelf, which I have had from undoubted authority, as well as the other pieces that are in the preſent edition. The moſt curious I take to be, the author's letter to the king of Pruſſia, which he wrote in Holland, in his return from a viſit he paid that monarch. It is in ſuch letters, which were not intended for the preſs, that we may diſcover the real thoughts of men.

Amſterdam, this 18th of November, 1742. P. D. L. M.

On the SAME SUBJECT.

In a letter to his Majeſty the King of PRUSSIA.

SIRE,

I Am at preſent like the pilgrims of Mecca, whoſe eyes are turned back towards that object of their devotions, from the moment they leave it; mine are turned towards your court. My heart, full of the favours I have received from you, is penetrated with regret at not being able to live near your majeſty.

I take the liberty to ſend you a new copy of the tragedy of Mahomet, the firſt ſketch of which I ſubmitted to you ſome years ago. It is a tribute I pay to the lover of the arts, to the learned judge, eſpecially to the philoſopher, much more than to the ſovereign.

Your majeſty is acquainted with the motives that guided my pen, when I was writing this work. Theſe motives were the love of mankind, and the horror of fanaticiſm, two virtues made to be ever preſent near your throne. I always thought that tragedy ſhould not be a ſimple ſpectacle, which affects, but not amends the heart. What ſignify the paſſions or misfor-

unes of the heroes of antiquity to the preſent ace of men, if they do not contribute to our nſtruction? It is allowed that the comedy of Tartuffe, this maſter-piece that no nation has equalled, has been of infinite ſervice in ſhewing ypocriſy in its blackeſt colours. Why ſhould t not be attempted in tragedy, to attack that ſpecies of impoſture which ſets in action the hypocriſy of ſome, and the enthuſiaſtic rage of others? Why ſhould not we trace it back to thoſe criminal, though illuſtrious founders of ſuperſtition and fanaticiſm, who firſt took the knife from the altar, to make victims of thoſe who refuſed to be their diſciples? Theſe who aſſert that the aera of ſuch crimes is over, that we ſhall ſee no more Barchocheba's, Mahomets, or Johns of Leyden, do too great honour, methinks, to human nature. The ſame poiſon ſtill ſubſiſts, though leſs uncovered; this plague which appears ſtifled, produces every now and then, anew, ſome dire effects pernicious enough to infect the world. Have we not ſeen in our own days, the prophets of the Cevenes * kill in God's name, ſuch of their ſect as were not ſubmiſſive to them?

The action I repreſent is attrocious, and I do not know that horror has been puſhed farther on any ſtage. A youth naturally virtuous, ſeduced by his fanaticiſm, murders an old man that loves him, and in the idea of ſerving God, becomes guilty of parricide without knowing it.

* Fanatic Hugonots in the mountainy parts of the province of Languedoc in France.

An impoſtor orders this murder, and the promiſed recompence is the enjoyment of inceſtuous love.

I own this is introducing horror on the ſtage; and your majeſty is conſcious that tragedy ſhould not conſiſt merely in a declaration of love, a fit of jealouſy, and a marriage.

Our hiſtorians mention actions ſtill more criminal than the one I have invented. Seide *, at leaſt, is ignorant that it is his father he kills, and as ſoon as he commits the fact, he feels a repentance equal to the heinouſneſs of his crime. But Mezeray relates, that at Melun a father murdered his ſon for his religion, without feeling afterwards the leaſt regret. The ſtory of the two brothers Diaz is well known; one of whom was at Rome, and the other in Germany, in the beginning of the troubles cauſed by Luther. Bartholomew Diaz having heard at Rome, that his brother entered into the opinions of Luther, at Francfort, ſets out from Rome with a deſign to aſſaſſinate him, arrives and kills him. I have read in Herrera a Spaniſh author, that this "Bartholomew Diaz run a great riſk in this action, but that nothing can ſhake the reſolutions of a man of honour, when probity conducts him."

Herrera, in a religion all holy, and an enemy to perſecution and cruelty, in a religion that teaches to ſuffer without ſeeking revenge, was, then, of opinion, that probity could lead to murder and parricide! And yet people will not

* The name he gives to the above-mentioned young man in Mahomet.

exclaim from every ſide againſt ſuch infernal maxims. Maxims! that put the ponyard into the hand of the monſter who deprived France of Henry the great; that placed the picture of James Clement * on the altar, and his name in the calendar of ſaints. Such maxims loſt the life of William, prince of Orange, founder of the liberty and of the grandeur of the Dutch. Salcede firſt wounded him in the forehead with a piſtol ſhot: Strada relates in theſe very words, "that Salcede would not undertake this action till after purifying his ſoul by confeſſion at the foot of a dominican friar, and fortifying it by the holy ſacrament." Herrera ſays ſomething ſtill more wicked and impious, "eſtendo firme con el exemplo de nueſtro Salvadore Jeſu Chriſto y de ſu ſanctos." Being ſtrengthened by the example of our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, and of his ſaints.

Balthazar Girard, who took away the life of this great man, prepared himſelf in the ſame manner as Salcede.

I have remarked that all thoſe who have committed the like crimes, from inward perſuaſion, were young men like Seide. Balthazar Girard was about twenty. The four Spaniards who had agreed with him to kill the prince of Orange,

* Clement aſſaſſinated Henry the third of France, at the time he was beſieging the city of Paris, whoſe inhabitants had revolted from his power, and joined the duke of Guiſe. The Pariſians placed the ſtatue of Clement on the altar next to the crucifix, and wore his picture hanging to a ribbon about their necks, as that of a ſaint and of a deliverer.

were of the ſame age. The monſter who ſtabbed Henry the third, was but twenty-four. Poltrot, who was the aſſaſſin of the duke of Guiſe, was five and twenty; it is the æra of illuſion and enthuſiaſtic rage.

I have been almoſt a witneſs in England, to what the force of fanaticiſm can bring a young and weakly imagination. A boy of ſixteen, named Shepherd, undertook to murder George the firſt, your relation. What could have induced Shepherd to ſuch a horrible crime? merely becauſe he happened to be not of the ſame religion with the king. His youth was pitied, his pardon was offered him, and he was a long time urged to repentance; but he ſtill perſiſted in ſaying, that it was better to obey the commands of God, than follow the dictates of men; and that if he was free, the firſt uſe he would make of his liberty ſhould be, to kill his ſovereign. The government was obliged to put him to death as a wild beaſt, whoſe ſavage nature could not be ſubdued.

I dare aſſert, that whoever has much lived in the world, muſt have taken notice, how ready people are to ſacrifice humanity to ſuperſtition. How many fathers have hated and diſinherited their children! How many brothers have perſecuted their brothers from this ſole motive! I have ſeen examples of it in many families.

If ſuperſtition is not always remarkable for theſe exceſſes, which are numbered in the hiſtory of crimes, yet it is, every day, the ſpring of many little evils in ſociety. It diſunites friends; it divides relations; it perſecutes the wiſe man,

who is ſatisfied in doing good actions, by the hands of the enthuſiaſtic madman. It does not always repreſent the empoiſoned draught to Socrates; but it baniſhes Deſcartes from a town which ſhould have been the aſylum of liberty *. It gives to Jurieu, who affected the prophet, credit enough to reduce to want the learned and philoſophic Bayle. It baniſhes from the univerſity of Leipſic, the ſucceſſor of the great Leibnitz †; before he could return it was neceſſary that God ſhould bleſs us with a king, who is, at the ſame time a philoſopher; a true miracle, which he very ſeldom performs. In vain does human reaſon grow perfect by philoſophy, which now makes ſuch a rapid force in Europe. In vain, do you above all, great prince, make repeated efforts to practiſe and inſpire this human philoſophy. We ſee in this very age, while reaſon on one ſide erects her throne, the moſt

* A ſmall town in Holland, which this great deſtroyer of the Ariſtotelian philoſophy choſe for his retreat and ſafety, from religious diſputes and cabals; for the ſentiments of Ariſtotle were then become articles of faith, and defended with equal warmth and zeal. Even Holland did not afford him a ſufficient aſylum: he then removed to Sweden, where he was invited by the famous queen Chriſtina, who afterwards abdicated the throne, and devoted herſelf entirely to learning and the muſes.

† Chriſtianus Wolf, whoſe works are much admired in Germany. He defended the opinions of his predeceſſor, and beſides many learned tracts on metaphyſics and logics, as well as on natural philoſophy, he has left a very complete courſe of the mathematics.

abſurd fanaticiſm ſets up its altars on the other *.

Perhaps it will be ſaid, that giving too much way to my zeal, I make Mahomet commit a crime in this piece, which in fact he was not guilty of.

The count de Boulainvilliers wrote ſome years ago, the life of this prophet. He endeavours to repreſent him as a great man that Providence had choſen to puniſh the chriſtians, and to change the face of a part of the world.

Mr. Sale, who has given an excellent tranſlation of the koran into Engliſh, would fain make Mahomet paſs for a Numa and a Theſeus. I allow that if he was born to a throne, or called to the government by the voice of the people, and had given laws of peace, like Numa, or protected his countrymen, as it is ſaid of Theſeus, he would deſerve reſpect. But that a dealer in camels ſhould raiſe a ſedition in his native village; that joined by a few miſerable Coracites †, he ſhould perſuade them that he held frequent converſation with the angel Gabriel; that he ſhould boaſt of being tranſported to the heavens, and, there, received a part of this unintelligible book, which makes common ſenſe ſhudder in every page; that in order to have his koran reſpected and believed, he ſhould bring rapine and deſtruction into his country; that he ſhould murder

* He probably means the Moravians in Germany and England, or the Janſeniſts in France.

† A tribe among the Arabians to which Mahomet belonged

the fathers; ravish the daughters; that he should leave the conquered, only the alternative of his religion or of death; all this is certainly what cannot be excusable, but in the eyes of a mussulman, in whom superstition has stifled all natural light of reason, or sparkle of humanity.

I know that Mahomet did not contrive precisely such a plot, as makes the subject of this tragedy. History only says, that he took away the wife of Seide, one of his disciples, and that he persecuted Abusofian, whom I call Zophire: but is not the man, that wages war with his own country, and dares assert that it is by God's direction, capable of any thing? I did not merely pretend to represent a real action on the stage, but real manners; and to make men think, as in fact they do think, in the circumstances in which I place them, and in fine, to shew what horrid crimes knavery can invent, and fanaticism put in execution. Mahomet here is no more than Tartuffe armed with power.

I shall think myself well rewarded for my labour, if any of these weak minds, that are ever ready to receive the impressions of a foreign fury, not to be found at the bottom of their own hearts, can strengthen itself against such dangerous illusions, by the reading of this work; if, being struck with horror at the unfortunate obedience of Seide, it says to itself: "Why should I blindly obey the rage of those that cry out; hate, persecute, destroy whoever dares to differ with us in opinion, on subjects indifferent to us, and which we do not understand?"

I wish I could contribute to eradicate such

ſentiments from among men! The ſpirit of indulgence might make brothers of us all; that of perſecution is capable of producing only monſters.

Thus thinks your majeſty. It would be to me the greateſt comfort to live near ſo philoſophic a king. My attachment to you is equal to my regret; and if other duties call me away, they ſhall never efface from my breaſt the ſentiments which I owe to a prince who thinks and ſpeaks as a man, who deſpiſes that falſe gravity, which always hides lowneſs and ignorance; who communicates his thoughts with freedom, becauſe he can be under no fear of being found out; who is always deſirous of being informed, and who can inſtruct the moſt learned.

I ſhall always remain with the moſt profound reſpect, and the moſt lively acknowlegements, etc.

Rotterdam, January
20, 1742.

A

LETTER

to Pope BENEDICT the Fourteenth,

ſending him the tragedy of Mahomet*.

Moſt bleſſed Father,

YOUR holineſs will pardon the liberty that one of the loweſt of the faithful, but one the greateſt admirers of virtue, makes bold take, in ſubmitting to the chief of the true igion this performance againſt the founder of alſe and barbarous ſect.

To whom could I more properly dedicate the ire of the cruelty and errors of a falſe pro-et, than to the vicar and follower of a God lenity and truth?

Your holineſs will therefore give me leave to at your feet this little book and its author, d humbly to requeſt your protection for the e, and your benedictions for the other. With eſe moſt reſpectful ſentiments I kneel and kiſs ur ſacred feet.

Paris, Auguſt 27, 1745.

* Written originally in Italian.

A

LETTER

From the Sovereign Pontiff,

BENEDICT the FOURTEENTH

To Mr. de VOLTAIRE.

BENEDICT the Fourteenth, pope, to our beloved ſon, apoſtolic greeting and benediction.

LAST week was preſented to us your very fine tragedy of Mahomet, which we read with the greateſt pleaſure. Cardinal Paſſionei has ſince preſented to us your excellent poem on Fontenoy. Mr. Leprotti has alſo given us the diſtich *, which has been placed under our portrait. Yeſterday we received your letter of the ſeventeenth of Auguſt, from cardinal Valenti. Theſe are ſo many kind actions, for which we acknowlege our obligations and thanks, aſſuring you, at the ſame time, of the due eſteem we entertain of your juſtly applauded merit.

* Lambertinus hic eſt Romæ decus et pater orbis
Qui mundum ſcriptis docuit, virtutibus ornat.

When the above-mentioned diſtich was publiſhed at Rome, one of your countrymen is ſaid to have found fault with a word in it, in public converſation, aſſerting that the particle *hic*, ſhould certainly have been long inſtead of being ſhort, as it is in that diſtich.

We anſwered, that he muſt miſtake, as the word *hic* may be either long or ſhort, Virgil having made it ſhort in this verſe;

Solus hic inflexit ſenſus animumque labentem;

And having made it long in this other line;

Hic finis Priami fatorum, hic exitus illum.

We thought we anſwered this objection pretty well, conſidering it is fifty years ſince we have read Virgil. Though this is, properly ſpeaking, your own cauſe, yet we have ſo good an opinion of your probity and candour, that we make you judge of this diſpute between us and our adverſary; and we conclude with giving you our apoſtolic benediction.

Dated at Rome, this 19th of September, 1745, and of our exaltation the ſixth year.

K

TAYLOR INST. OXFORD

A LETTER

To Pope BENEDICT the Fourteenth.

THE features of your holineſs are not better expreſſed in the medals I have received from your great goodneſs, than your genius and mind in the letter which you deigned to honour me with, and for which I offer your holineſs my moſt humble and ſincere thanks.

Indeed I am obliged to acknowlege your infallibility in deciſions of literature, as well as in things of a more ſerious nature: Your holineſs is much better acquainted with the Latin, than the Frenchman whom you were pleaſed to correct; for my part, I admire how you can remember Virgil ſo exactly. The popes have always been the moſt diſtinguiſhed for learning among the ſovereign princes, and none of the popes have joined to ſo much erudition *, ſo many ornaments of polite learning:

Agnoſco rerum dominos gentemque togatam,

* Benedict the fourteenth was a very laborious and ingenious writer. His printed works make fifteen volumes in folio. He was remarkable, even before he was made pope, for his great knowlege in the canon law.

If the Frenchman, who miſtook in his criticiſm, relative to the particle *hic*, had Virgil by heart as well as yours holineſs, he might have quoted a verſe, in which it is both long and ſhort in the ſame line. This fine verſe ſeemed to me as a preſage of the favours conferred on me by your bounty. This is it:

Hic vir hic eſt tibi quem promitti ſæpius audis.

How muſt Rome have rejoiced when Benedict the fourteenth was exalted to its ſee! I kiſs your ſacred feet with ſentiments of the greateſt reverence and gratitude, etc.

Of the Excessive Delicacy of the French Taste in their Dramatic Repreſentations.

In a Letter from Mr. de Voltaire, to the Marquiſs Scipio Maffei, Author of the Italian Merope, and of ſeveral other celebrated performances.

SIR,

THE antient Greeks and Romans, from whom the moderns of all nations have borrowed almoſt every thing they know, addreſſed their works, without the vain form of compliment, to their friends, and to the learned.

It is under theſe titles that I offer you the homage of the French Merope.

The Italians, who have been the reſtorers of many of the fine arts, and the inventors of ſome, were the firſt that, under the inſpection of pope Leo the tenth, revived tragedy. And in this age, in which the art of Sophocles began to be enervated by love-intrigues, often foreign to the ſubject; or debaſed by low buffoonery, which is a diſhonour to the taſte of your ingenious countrymen; you, Sir, are the firſt who have had the courage and the talents to compoſe a tragedy free from gallantry, a tragedy, worthy of the flouriſhing days of Athens, in

which maternal love is the whole intrigue, and where the moſt tender intereſt proceeds from the pureſt virtue.

France glories in Athalia*: it is the maſter-piece of our theatre; it is the maſter-piece of poetry; of all our plays that are now acted, it is the only one where love is not admitted; but then it is ſupported by the pomp of religion, and the majeſty of prophetic eloquence. You have not had theſe reſources; and, yet, you have ſupplied the long career of five acts, which it is ſo prodigiouſly difficult to fill up without epiſodes.

I muſt own, your ſubject appears to me much more intereſting and tragical than that of Athalia; and, if, on the one hand, our admirable Racine has much more art, more poetry, and more grandeur in his performance; I dare ſay on the other, that yours has cauſed greater emotions in every heart, and drawn more tears from every eye.

The preceptor of Alexander, (and kings ſhould have ſuch preceptors) Ariſtotle, whoſe genius was ſo extenſive, ſo juſt, and ſo learned in what was then within the reach of man, did not heſitate to declare in his immortal art of poetry, that the moment of Merope's diſcovering her

* A tragedy wrote by Racine, and taken from ſcripture, of which the reverend Mr. Maſon ſays, in one of his letters prefixed to *Elfrida*, that "it is a poem in which the moſt ſuperb and auguſt ſpectacle, the moſt intereſting event, and the moſt ſublime flow of inſpired poetry, are all nobly and naturally united."

ſon, was the moſt intereſting in all the Grecian ſcene. Plutarch relates, that the Greeks, a people who were ſo ſuſceptible of delicate impreſſions, uſed to be in the utmoſt dread, leſt the old man, who was to ſtop Merope's hand, ſhould not arrive time enough. This play, which was acted in his days, and of which very few fragments now remain, was, in his opinion, the moſt moving of all the tragedies of Euripides. But the choice of his ſubject was not the ſole cauſe of his ſucceſs, though it contributed to it very much. It has been often, but unſucceſsfully, treated in France. The authors, probably, wanted to load the ſubject, ſo ſimple in itſelf, with foreign ornaments. It was the naked Venus of Praxiteles, whom they had a mind to cover with tinſel. How much time is loſt before people will be brought to believe, that in all grand ſubjects they muſt recur to what is natural and ſimple!

In 1641, when the ſtage began to flouriſh in France, and to raiſe itſelf even above that of Greece, by the genius of the elder Corneille, cardinal Richelieu, who ſought after every kind of glory, and who built a playhouſe near his own palace, for the repreſentation of thoſe pieces, of which himſelf had given the deſign, got a Merope acted there under the name of Telephontes. The plan is ſuppoſed to be entirely his; there are alſo about an hundred lines of his compoſing: the reſt was done by Colletet, Boiſrobert, Deſmarets and Chapelain: but all the power of cardinal Richelieu could not give theſe writers the genius that providence had denied

hem. The cardinal, perhaps, was not poſſeſſed of a genius for the ſtage, though he had a taſte for it; and all he could, or ought to have done, was, to encourage the great Corneille.

Monſieur Gilbert, the famous queen Chriſtina of Sweden's reſident at Paris, brought his Merope on the ſtage in 1643, which, at preſent, is as little known, as the firſt I mentioned. John de la Chapelle, who was of the French academy, and author of Cleopatra that met with ſome ſucceſs, got a Merope acted in the year 1683. He, alſo, took care to fill up his piece with an epiſode of love. He complains in his preface of being reproached with bordering too much on the marvellous; but it was not the marvellous that hurt the ſucceſs of his play; it was his want of genius, and the poorneſs of his verſification: for, there lies the grand point; this is the capital vice that condemns ſo many poems to oblivion. The art of being eloquent in verſe is, of all arts, the moſt difficult and moſt rare. It is eaſy to find people who can plan a work, and verſify it in a common manner; but to treat it like true poets is a talent, imparted perhaps only to three or four men in the world.

In the month of December 1701, monſieur de la Grange brought his Amaſis on the ſtage, which is nothing more than Merope under other names. There is alſo a love-intrigue in this performance, and more marvellous incidents than in that of La Chapelle; but then it is conducted with more art, more genius, more intereſt; it is wrote with greater warmth and force: yet its ſucceſs in the beginning was not very brilliant,

et habent ſua fata libelli; but it has bee
acted with great applauſe, and is one of
plays, whoſe repreſentation has given moſ
ſure to the public.

Before and after Amaſis, we have had
tragedies on pretty much the ſame ſubj
which, a mother going to revenge the n
of her ſon, on that very ſon, finds out h
is, in the moment ſhe intended to kill him.
were even accuſtomed to ſee on our ſta
ſtriking, but for the moſt part, improbat
tuation; in which, a perſon ſeems armed
ponyard, in order to put his enemy to
but on the point of execution, is hindere
third perſon, who enters and diſarms him.
ſtriking incident, at leaſt for a time, gave
to the Camma of Thomas Corneille. But
theſe pieces, there is none which is not
with an epiſode of love, or rather, gall
for, every thing muſt yield to the reigning
and do not imagine, Sir, that this wretche
tom of introducing into our tragedies an
epiſode of gallantry, is owing to Racine,
thought in Italy. On the contrary, he di
ry thing, that lay in his power, to correc
taſte of his countrymen, in that particular.
will never find in his plays the paſſion o
brought in by way of epiſode; it is the g
plot of all his pieces, and always forms the
cipal intereſt in the play. Love is the mo
atrical of all the paſſions, the moſt fertile i
timents, and the moſt productive of varie
muſt be the very ſoul of a dramatic perfor
or entirely baniſhed from it. If love is n

gical, it is insipid; and when it is really tragical, it should reign alone. It was Rotrou, it was, I must confess, the great Corneille himself, who, in establishing our theatre, have, almost always, disfigured it by these arbitrary amours, these scenes of gallantry; which, not being real passions, are unworthy of the tragic stage.

I say nothing here, Sir, but what persons of knowlege and taste say to each other every day; what you have often heard repeated at my house; in a word, what several frankly declare in private conversation, but what none, before, had the courage to publish in their writings. You know the general practice; almost every body writes contrary to his own private opinion, for fear of clashing with the established prejudices of mankind. For my part, who never consulted policy in any of my writings, I declare the truth without reserve; and I must add here, that I have a greater respect for Corneille, and am better acquainted with the extraordinary merit of this father of our stage, than those who launch out in his praises, without ever considering his imperfections.

There was a Merope acted on the theatre of London, in the year 1731*. Who would expect that a love intrigue should find admission there too? But since the reign of Charles the second, love has taken possession of the English stage; and it must be allowed, no nation has ever described this passion so ill.

Love, improperly introduced and ridiculously

* Wrote by George Jeffreys, Esq.

handled, is yet the least glaring fault in the E
lish Merope. Young Egistus, released from i
prisonment by one of the maids of honour t
is in love with him, is brought before the que
who offering him a bowl of poison, and prese
ing a ponyard to his mistress's breast, tells hi

I stab thy image in her heart, if thou
Delay'st a moment. Drink, or see her die.

He drinks and is carried off dying. He retu
in the fifth act, to acquaint Merope that h
her son, and that he killed the tyrant. I
rope asks how this miracle came about, an
answered by her maid, who says:

Ismene
Deceiv'd you once; but sure you will forgive
Employ'd by you to fetch the poison'd draugh
Design'd against your son, the secret whispers
Of my prophetic tender heart, inspir'd me
To put the change on your deluded hate.
A powerful opiate in the venom's room,
With sudden influence lock'd his senses fast;
And guiltless of the death your vengeance me
Produc'd it's image, sleep.

And by Egistus, who thus relates the rest:

My body, lifeless as it seem'd, was safe
Beneath your roof, and when the drousy wei
Of that lethargic draught gave way, I wak'd
In pleasing wonder to behold Timoclea,

e, and my other friends: They told me
ſecret of my birth, and how the tyrant
r'd to force you to his bed; with that,
rained at one gallant throw to ſave
life, or loſe my own, I plac'd myſelf
: by the altar, with my choſen few.
nce the tyrant came; at once my ſword
drawn, and pierc'd his heart.

s the piece. This tragedy was ill-receiv-
it is it not amazing that it ſhould be repre-
at all? Does it not prove, that the Eng-
atre is not quite refined?* It ſeems as
ſame cauſe which deprives that nation of
us for painting and muſic, robs it alſo of
r tragedy. That iſland, which has produced
ateſt philoſophers in the world, is not e-
fertile in the fine arts; and if the Engliſh
t ſeriouſly attend to the wiſe precepts of
xcellent countrymen, Addiſon and Pope,
vill not approach other nations in matters
e and literature.

t though Merope was ſo disfigured in one

t would be neceſſary, perhaps, at Paris, to
ate the Engliſh genius and theatre from theſe
ons of monſieur de Voltaire: but here I think
cient to make uſe of his own arguments in the
ing of his ſecond letter to Sir Everard Fal-
and ſay, that our diſapprobation of Mr.
s's Merope is an additional proof of our judg-
decency, and taſte; as well as the Pariſians
on of a ſcandalous farce acted on their theatre,
ording to monſieur de Voltaire, a freſh in-
of their politeneſs.

part of Europe, it had been long before treated in Italy, after the manner of the antients.

In the ſixteenth century, that century which will be for ever famous, the count de Torelli wrote a Merope with choruſes. If monſieur de la Chapelle has gone beyond the uſual defects in the French theatre, in romantic air, uſeleſs intrigues, and epiſodes; if the Engliſh writer has exceeded others in barbariſm, indecency, and abſurdity; the Italian author on his ſide has puſhed to exceſs the faults of the Grecian ſtage, which are declamation and want of action. In fine, Sir, you have kept clear of all theſe rocks; you had already enriched your countrymen with models in more than one ſpecies of literature; you now give them in your Merope, an example of a ſimple, and, yet, intereſting, tragedy. I was charmed with it from the moment I firſt read it. My love for my country never rendered me blind to foreign merit. On the contrary, the more zeal I have for my country, the more I ſtrive to enrich it with foreign treaſures. The deſire I had to tranſlate your Merope encreaſed, on my contracting an acquaintance with you at Paris, in the year 1733. I perceived that on loving the author, I took a greater liking to his work. But when I began this undertaking, I found it abſolutely impoſſible to make it paſs on the French ſtage. Our delicacy is become exceſſive: we are Sibarites, perhaps, plunged in luxury, who can no longer bear this native ruſtic dreſs and air, theſe details of rural life, which you have imitated from the Greek theatre.

I would not dare to introduce Egiſtus on our ſtage, making a preſent of his ring to the perſon that arreſts him, and the man accepting it. I could not venture to have a hero taken for a robber, though his ſituation authorized ſuch a miſtake.

Our cuſtoms, which probably indulge us in many things that yours do not admit of, would not allow us to repreſent the tyrant of Merope, and the murderer of her huſband and of her ſons, becoming her ſuitor after fifteen years ſilence; nor could I make Merope thus addreſs the tyrant: "Why did you not ſpeak of love before, when the flowers of youth ſtill adorned theſe features?" Such diſcourſes are natural; but our pit, which is ſometimes ſo indulgent, and at other times ſo nice, might think them too familiar, and imagine they ſaw coquetry, where, in fact, there was nothing contrary to nature and reaſon.

Nor would the French theatre approve of Merope's tying her ſon to a pillar on the ſtage, and running at him twice with a javelin and hatchet in her hand; nor of Egiſtus's twice getting away and aſking his life of the tyrant.

Our cuſtoms would be ſtill more violated, ſhould Merope's confidant perſuade Egiſtus to fall aſleep upon the ſtage, that the queen might have time to come and aſſaſſinate him. Not but that all this is natural; but you muſt pardon our nation, which demands, that nature ſhould be always preſented with certain ſtrokes of art; and theſe ſtrokes are very different in Paris, from what they are at Verona.

In order to give some idea of these differe
which the genius of cultivated nations is ap
make in the same arts, permit me, Sir, to q
some passages of your celebrated tragedy,
appeared to me the genuine language of
ture.

The man that seizes Egistus, and takes
ring, says to him:

Or dunque in tuo paese i servi
Han di coteste gemme! in bel paese
Fia questo tuo; nel nostro non tal gemma
Ad un dito real non sconvenibbe.*

The tyrant's friend says to him, speakin
the queen, who rejects the hand of the ave
assassin of her family:

La donna, comme sai, ricusa e brama.†

One of the queen's attendants thus answer
tyrant who presses her to dispose her misfor
marriage:

——— Dissimulato in vano
S'offre di febre. Affatto alquanti giorni
Donare e forza a rinfrancar suoi spiriti. ‡

* Slaves then in your country wear
Such costly jewels? a most charming country
Sure yours must be. Here such a precious gem
Might well adorn the finger of a king.

† Woman, you know, desires, and yet re

‡ Sir, I must own the queen has got a fever
Allow some time to raise her drooping spiri

In your ſixth act, the old man Polydore aſks of a perſon belonging to Merope's court, who he is? I am Euriſes, ſays he, Nicander's ſon. Polidore then begins to talk of Nicander, and expreſſes himſelf as Neſtor does in Homer.

——— Egli era umano,
E liberal: quando appariva, tutti
Facceangli onor. Io mi ricordo ancora
Di quanto ei ſfoggio con bella pompa
Le ſue nozze con Sylvia, ch'era figlia
D' Olimpia e di Glicon, fratel d'Ipparco.
Tu dunque ſei quel fanciullin che in corte
Silvia condur ſolea quaſi per pompa.
Parmi l'altri hieri, o quanto ſiete preſſi,
Quanto voi vaffretate, o gio vinetti
A farvi adulti e a gridar facendo
Chi noi diam loco! *

And in another place the ſame old man, invited to the ceremony of the queen's marriage, thus anſwers:

——— Oh curioſo
Punto non ſon, paſſo ſtagione. Aſſai

L 2

* He was humane and liberal. When-e'er
Abroad he came, all joined to pay him honour.
Still memory records, with what ſolemnity
And radiant pomp, he was eſpouſed to Silvia,
Daughter of Glicon and the fair Olimpia.
You then are Euriſes, whom when an infant,
Silvia oft brought to court with ſuch attendance.
It ſeems but yeſterday. How quickly youth
Shoots up, and gives us notice to depart,
And leave the world to them!

Veduti ho facrificii ; io mi ricordo
Di quello ancora, quando il re Cresfonte
Encommencio a regnar. Quella fu pompa.
Ora più non fi fanno a queſti tempi
Di cotaï ſacrifici pia di cento.
Fur le beſtie ſvenate, I ſacerdoti
Riſplendean tutti, ed ove ti volgeſſi
Altro non ſi vedea che argento ed oro. †

All theſe paſſages are natural: they are adapted to the perſonages you introduce, and to the manners you ſuppoſe them. Thoſe ingenious familiarities would have been probably well recieved at Athens; but Paris and our pit demands a different ſpecies of ſimplicity. We might even boaſt of having a more cultivated taſte than the inhabitants of Athens; for, if I do not miſtake, plays were acted in that firſt city of Greece, generally ſpeaking, but on four ſolemn feſtivals; and at Paris we have more than one theatrical entertainment every day in the year. There were not reckoned above ten thouſand citizens at Athens: our city is ſuppoſed to contain near eight hundred thouſand ſouls, among whom we may calculate that there are

† My curious days are o'er. Theſe eyes have ſeen
Solemnities enough. I yet remember
When king Cresfontes' happy reign began ;
'Twas marked with feſtivals and pomp ſo great,
That preſent times can offer no compariſon.
More than a hundred victims bled before
The ſacred altars ; holy prieſts around
Stood glitt'ring ; and, the dazzled eye beheld
Nothing but ſilver and the pureſt gold.

thirty thouſand who are judges of dramatic performances, and who judge almoſt every day.

You have had it in your power to adopt in your tragedy, that elegant and ſimple compariſon of Virgil:

Qualis populeâ mœrens philomela ſub umbrâ
Amiſſos queritur fœtus.

So cloſe in poplar ſhades, her children gone,
The mother nightingale laments alone.

Dryden.

Were I to take the liberty, I ſhould be ſoon ſent back with my compariſon to epic poetry, its proper place; ſo hard a maſter is the public whom I have to deal with!

Neſcis heu! neſcis noſtræ faſtidia Romæ:
Et pueri naſum Rhinocerotis habent.

Faſtidious taſte prevails and governs here;
Ev'n boys turn up the noſe, and learn to ſneer.

The Engliſh have a cuſtom of finiſhing every act with a ſimile: but we require, in a tragedy, the hero to ſpeak, and not the poet; and our audience is of opinion, that in a critical ſtate of affairs, in council, in a violent paſſion, or in a preſſing danger, princes and miniſters make no poetical compariſons.

I could not, beſides, introduce frequently on the ſtage inferior perſonages ſpeaking together. They contribute with you, to prepare

the more intereſting ſcenes between the principal actors; they are ſo many avenues that lead to a fine palace; but ſuch is the impatience of our audiences, that they inſiſt upon entering into it at once. We muſt therefore yield to the taſte of a nation the more difficult to pleaſe, as it has been long already in poſſeſſion of ſo many different maſter-pieces.

But in theſe details, which our extreme nicety would not admit of, how very many beauties have I regretted? how much native nature pleaſed me, though in a foreign dreſs? I mention, Sir, part of theſe reaſons which hindered me from imitating you, as much as I admired you.

I was then abſolutely obliged to write a new Merope. I have therefore wrote one different from yours; but I am very far from flattering myſelf that I have wrote it better. I look upon myſelf with regard to you, as a traveller, to whom an eaſtern king had made a preſent of rich brocades: this king ſhould allow the traveller the privilege to wear them according to the mode of his own country.

My Merope was finiſhed in the year 1733, pretty much in the ſame manner as it now appears to you. Other engagements hindered me from bringing it then on the ſtage. But what deterred me moſt from making it appear at that time, was the other plays which had met with ſucceſs a little before, and which were wrote on the ſame ſubject, though under different names. At laſt I ventured my tragedy on the ſtage, and our nation ſhewed that ſhe was not diſpleaſed to ſee the ſame ſubject diverſly handled. It happen-

ed with our theatre, as it happens every day in a gallery of paintings, where ſeveral pictures repreſent the ſame ſtory; men of taſte find pleaſure in remarking the various manner, and each according to his turn is ſtruck with the ſtile of particular painters. It is a kind of trial of ſkill which contributes to the perfection of the arts, and to the information of the public.

If the French Merope has met with the ſame ſucceſs as the Italian, it is to you, Sir, I am indebted for it; it is to that ſimplicity which I was always ſo fond of, and of which your performance furniſhed me the model. Though I have marched in a different track from you, yet you have been conſtantly my guide.

I with it were in my power to follow the example of the Engliſh and the Italians, as to blank verſe.

But I ſoon perceived, and have long ſince ſaid, that ſuch an attempt would never ſucceed in France, and that it ſhewed more weakneſs than ſtrength of parts, to endeavour throwing off a yoke borne by authors of ſo many performances, which will laſt as long as the French nation or language.

Our poetry is not allowed the many other liberties which are taken in yours; and perhaps this is one reaſon why the Italians have been three or four ages beforehand with us in this amiable, but difficult art.

I ſhould be glad, Sir, to follow your example in other reſpects, as well as in tragedy. I would particularly form myſelf on your taſte in the ſcience of hiſtory; not that vague and barren

knowlege of facts and dates, which consists in retaining, when such a man, useless, perhaps, or pernicious to the world, left it; a mere dictionary science, which clogs the memory, without informing the judgment.

I mean the history of the mind of man; that leads us into the knowlege of manners, and traces out, fault by fault, and prejudice after prejudice, the effects of human passions; that lays before us the evils produced by ignorance or mistaken knowlege; that, above all, marks out the progress of arts, through the savage broils of potentates, and the overthrow of empires.

Such histories are precious in my eyes; and I shall value them more, on account of the rank in which they must place you, Sir, among those to whom mankind is indebted for new pleasures and instructions. Posterity will emulate your country, which has rendered you such distinguished honours, has erected you a statue with this inscription, To THE MARQUIS SCIPIO MAFFEI, LIVING. As fine an inscription in its kind, as that at Montpellier; To LEWIS THE FOURTEENTH, AFTER HIS DEATH. Vouchsafe to add, Sir, to the homages of your fellow-citizens, that of a foreigner, whose esteem and attachment for you, are as sincere as if I had been a native of Verona.

Of SHAKESPEARE; and the Taſte of the ENGLISH in their Theatrical Entertainments.

In a PREFACE * to the Tragedy of CÆSAR, 1738.

WE give this edition of the tragedy of the Death of Caeſar, by Mr. de Voltaire, who, we can ſafely ſay, is the firſt that has made the Engliſh muſes known in France. He tranſlated into verſe ſome years ago, ſeveral paſſages out of the beſt poets of England, for the inſtruction of his friends; and, by that means, he induced many to learn the Engliſh; ſo that, now, this language is become familiar to men of letters. It is doing ſervice to our minds to embelliſh them thus with the riches of foreign countries.

Among the moſt ſingular extracts from the Engliſh poets that our friend tranſlated for us, was the ſcene of Antony and the people of Rome, taken from the tragedy of Julius Caeſar, which was wrote an hundred and fifty years ago

* This, in the original, is called the publiſher's preface.

by the famous Shakeſpear, and acted to this day with ſuch ſucceſs on the theatres of London. We aſked for the whole play, but it was impoſſible to tranſlate it.

Shakeſpear was a great genius, but he lived in an ignorant age, and one finds in all his pieces the barbariſm of the times, much more than the genius of the writer. Mr. de Voltaire, inſtead of tranſlating the monſtrous compoſition of Shakeſpear, wrote, in the Engliſh taſte, this Julius Caeſar, which we do now preſent to the public. This imitation is not like the Sir Politic of Mr. de St. Evremond, who, without any knowlege of the Engliſh ſtage, or being even acquainted with the language, publiſhed his Sir Politic, with an intent to make Engliſh comedy known to the French. It may be juſtly ſaid of that comedy that it was neither in the taſte of the Engliſh, nor of any other nation.

It is eaſy to perceive in the tragedy of the death of Caeſar, the genius and the character of the Engliſh writers, as well as that of the Roman people. There reigns through it that predominant love of liberty, and that boldneſs of ſentiment, which is ſeldom to be met with in French authors.

The Engliſh have another tragedy of the death of Caeſar, wrote by the duke of Buckingham. There is one in Italian, by the abbe Conti, a Venetian nobleman. Theſe performances agree but in this particular, that there is no love in any of them. None of theſe authors debaſed this grand ſubject with an intrigue of gallantry; but about five and thirty years ago

one of the greateſt wits in France * having joined with miſs Barbier to compoſe a Julius Caeſar, he took care to repreſent Caeſar and Brutus as lovers, and as jealous of each other. This ridicule is one of the moſt ſtriking examples of the force of cuſtom. Nobody dares to correct the French ſtage in this particular. In Racine, Mithridates, Alexander and Porus muſt be gallants, Corneille did not get the better of this weakneſs in any one inſtance. None of his plays are without love, and, it muſt be confeſſed, that in his tragedies, if you except the Cid and Polyeuctes, this paſſion is as ill painted as it is improperly introduced. Our preſent author has, perhaps, gone into the other extreme. Several people complain that this play contains too much ferocity; they are ſtruck with horror at ſeeing Brutus ſacrificing to the love of his country, not only his benefactor, but his father. All that can be anſwered is, that ſuch was the character of Brutus, and that men muſt be drawn ſuch as they are. There ſtill ſubſiſts a letter wrote by this high-ſpirited Roman, in which he declares, he would kill his very father for the ſafety of the republic. It is known that Caeſar was his father: that is enough to juſtify this boldneſs of Mr. de Voltaire.

* Monſieur de Fontenelle.

TAYLOR INST. OXFORD

DISSERTATION

On ANTIENT and MODERN TRAGEDY.

Addreſſed to his Eminence Cardinal QUERINI, a noble Venetian, Biſhop of Breſcia, and Librarian of the Vatican.

My LORD,

IT was worthy of ſuch a genius as your lordſhip's, and of a perſon who is at the head of the moſt antient library in the world, to devote yourſelf entirely to literature. We muſt have expected ſuch princes of the church under a pontiff *, who had enlightened the Chriſtian world before he governed it. But if the learned in general are indebted to you, I am more particularly ſo than the reſt, for the honour you have done me in tranſlating into ſuch beautiful verſe the Henriade, and the poem of Fontenoy. The two virtuous heroes I have ſung, are become, at preſent, yours. You have added beauties to my writings, in order to render the names of Henry the

* Benedict the fourteenth.

fourth and of Lewis the fifteenth, ſtill more revered in Europe, and in order to extend the farther a taſte for the fine arts.

Among the obligations that all modern nations lie under to the Italians, and eſpecially to the popes and their miniſters, we muſt reckon the advancement of literature, which has ſoftened by degrees the groſs and ſavage manners of our northern nations, and to which we are now indebted for our politeneſs, our glory and our delight.

It was under the great Leo the tenth, that the Greek theatre was reſtored, as well as the Grecian eloquence. The Sophoniſba of the celebrated prelate Triſſino, the pope's nuncio, was the firſt regular tragedy that Europe poſſeſſed, after ſo many ages of barbariſm: as the Calandra of cardinal Bibiena had already been the firſt comedy in modern Italy. You were the firſt who built magnificent theatres, and who communicated to the world ſome idea of that ſplendor of antient Greece, which drew together ſo many thouſand foreigners to its ſolemnities, and which was the model of other nations in every particular.

If your countrymen have not always equalled the antients in tragedy, it is not the fault of your language, which is fertile, harmonious, and pliable to every ſubject; but it is more probable that the progreſs you have made in muſic, has prejudiced that which you would have otherwiſe made in the true drama. The one obſtructed the advancement of the other.

Give me leave to enter into a literary diſcuſſion with your eminence. Some people accuſtomed to the general ſtile of dedicatory epiſtles, will be ſurpriſed at ſeeing me contented with comparing Greek and modern cuſtoms, inſtead of comparing the great men of antiquity to thoſe of your illuſtrious houſe; but I am addreſſing myſelf to a ſage, to a ſcholar, whoſe inſtructions will enlighten me, and with whom I have the honour to be a collegue in the moſt antient academy of Europe, whoſe members are employed in the like purſuits; I am addreſſing myſelf in fine, to a perſon who takes greater pleaſure in giving me inſtructions, than in receiving my compliments.

FIRST PART.

Of the Grecian tragedies, imitated by ſome French and Italian operas.

A celebrated author of your nation ſays, that ſince the flouriſhing days of Athens, Tragedy, wandering and abandoned, goes from country to country, in ſearch for ſome body to take it under its care, and reſtore it to its former honours; but has ſearched hitherto in vain.

If he means that in no nation there are theatres, in which choruſes fill up the ſcene in great meaſure, ſinging ſtrophes, epods, and anti-ſtrophes, accompanied by ſolemn dances; that in no nation there are actors raiſed on a kind of ſtilts, their faces covered with a vizard, one ſide of

which expreſſes joy, and the other, grief; that the declamation of our tragedies is not ſet to muſic, nor accompanied by flutes; he is certainly in the right; and it is not, perhaps, to our diſcredit. Perhaps the form of our tragedies, which draws nearer nature, is equal to thoſe of Greece, which bore a more impoſing, and awful aſpect.

If this author means, that, in general, this great art is not as much eſteemed ſince the revival of learning as it formerly was; that ſome European nations have now and then been ungrateful to the ſucceſſors of Sophocles and Euripides; that our theatres bear no reſemblance to thoſe magnificent edifices which the Athenians gloried in; that we are more negligent and regardleſs than they were, of theſe ſpectacles, which are become ſo neceſſary in our great towns; I am entirely of his opinion. *Et ſapit, et mecum facit, et jove judicat æquo.*

Where can we find a ſpectacle which can give us any idea of the Grecian ſtage? it is probably in your tragedies, called operas, that this reſemblance ſubſiſts. People may be ſurpriſed at my ſaying, that an Italian opera has ſome likeneſs to the Greek ſtage. Yet I muſt ſay the *recitativo* of the Italians, is exactly the *melopea* of the Greeks; it is this declamation ſet to muſic, and accompanied by muſical inſtruments. This melopea, which is tireſome only in your worſt *tragedy-operas*, is admirable in your choice compoſitions. The chorus which you have added for ſome years paſt, and which has a neceſſary connection

with the whole, is ſo much the more reſembling to the antient chorus, as it is ſung in a different manner from the recitativo; as the ſtrophe, the epode, and the anti-ſtrophe, were ſet to very different muſic from the melopea of the ſcenes. Add to theſe reſemblances, that in ſeveral of the tragic-operas of the celebrated abbe Metaſtaſio, the unities of action, time, and place, are obſerved; beſides, theſe pieces are full of that poetic expreſſion, that continued elegance, with which nature is adorned, but never over-charged; a talent, ſince the Greeks, poſſeſſed by Racine alone among us, and, Addiſon among the Engliſh.

I am conſcious that theſe tragedies, rendered ſo awful by the charms of muſic, and the grandeur of the whole ſpectacle, have one great fault, which the Greeks took care always to avoid; I know this fault has made monſters of pieces the beſt wrote, and; in other reſpects the moſt regular; it conſiſts in introducing in every ſcene, ſome little ſong, ſome detached *ariette*, that interupt the action, to ſhew the talents, and hear the trilling of an effeminate, but brilliant voice, at the expence of the intereſt we took in the ſtory, at the expence of common ſenſe. The great author whom I have juſt mentioned, and who took many of his pieces from our tragic theatre, has, through dint of genius, almoſt converted this fault into a beauty. The words of his ſongs are often an ornament to the ſubject; they are full of paſſion, and are ſometimes equal to the fineſt paſſages in the odes of Horace. I quote the following ſtanza as a

roof of this aſſertion; it is ſung by Arbaces, ho is wrongfully accuſed:

Vo Solcando un mar credule
Senza vele,
E ſenza ſarte:
Freme l'onda, il ciel s'imbruna,
Creſce il vento, e manca l'arte:
E il volar della fortuna
Son conſtretto a ſeguittar
Infelice in quello ſtato
Son de tutti abandonato;
Meco ſola é l' innocenza
Che mi porta a naufragar. *

I will add another ſublime *ariette* which is ung by the king of the Parthians, when defeat-d by Adrian, and reſolved to make his very loſs ontribute to his revenge:

Sprezza il furor del vento
Robuſta quercia, avvezza
Di cento venti e cento
L'injurie à tollerar:
E ſe pur cade al ſuolo,
Spiega per l'onde il volo;

* I am ſet adrift on a dangerous ſea: my veſſel as neither maſts nor ſails. The waves roar aloud, nd the heavens menace my deſtruction. The ſtorm ncreaſes, but I am void of ſkill to hinder its effects. Thus deſtined to whatever courſe the winds direct ne, and deſtitute of ſuccour, I am abandoned by all ut my innocence, which is the cauſe of my misfor-nes.

E con quel vento iſteſſo
Va contraſtando il mar. †

There are many more of equal beauty; but what are beauties when they are miſplaced? And what would have been ſaid at Athens, if Oedipus and Oreſtes, in the moment of the moſt intereſting event, had quavered ſongs, or addreſſed ſimiles to Electra and Jocaſta? we muſt then allow that the opera, in prepoſſeſſing the Italians by the charms of muſic, has deſtroyed on the one hand, the true tragedy of Greece, as it reſtored it on the other.

Our French operas would have been of ſtill worſe conſequence. Our melopea is ſtill more diſtant than yours from natural declamation; it is leſs ſpirited; it never allows the ſcenes a ſufficient length; it demands ſhort dialogues of little detached maxims, each of which produces a kind of ſong.

Let thoſe, who are acquainted with the true literature of other nations, and whoſe knowlege is not confined to the airs of our ballads, remember that admirable ſcene in the *Clemenza di Tito*, between Titus and his favourite, who had conſpired againſt him; I mean that ſcene in which Titus ſays to Sextus theſe divine words:

† The ſtrong and antient oak, which has withſtood the rigour of an hundred winters, deſpiſes the ſudden ſqualls of raging winds. And when at laſt their force has meaſured its proud length upon the waters, it even there becomes a new obſtacle to the freedom of their paſſage.

Siam ſoli; il tuto ſovrano
Non é preſente; apri il tuo core à Tito,
Confidati all' amico; io ti prometto
Qu' Anguſto nol ſapra. *

Let them read over the following ſoliloquy, where Titus ſays theſe other words, which ought to be the eternal leſſons of all kings, and the delight of all mankind.

———Il torre altrui la vita
E facolta commune
Al piu vil della terra; il darle è ſolo
De' numi, et de' regnanti. †

Theſe two ſcenes, equal, if not ſuperior, to any thing that Greece produced; worthy of Corneille when he does not declaim, and of Racine when he is not weak; theſe two ſcenes, which are not founded on a common opera-intrigue, but on the moſt noble ſentiments of the human mind, are three times as long as the longeſt ſcenes of our muſical tragedies. Such paſſages would not ſucceed on our lyric theatre, which is ſupported only by maxims of gallantry, and affected love, if you except Armida and the

* Sextus, we are alone. Your ſovereign is not preſent. Open the ſecrets of your heart to *Titus*, who is your friend. I promiſe you the *emperor* ſhall never know.

† The loweſt wretch on earth enjoys the power of taking life away; but the preſerving it, is a privilege granted only unto gods and ſovereigns.

fine ſcenes of Iphigenia, which are more admired than imitated.

Among many other faults, we alſo have in our deepeſt operas, a great number of ſeparate ſongs, which are ſtill more defective than yours, as they are leſs connected with the ſubject. The words are almoſt always choſen for the muſicians, who, not being able to expreſs in their little airs, the bold and nervous terms of our language, require words that are weak, effeminate, vague and foreign to the action, and adapted, ſome how or other, to meaſure airs, not unlike thoſe that are known in Venice under the name of *barcarole*. What connection, for example, between *Theſeus*, diſcovered by his father the very inſtant he was to be poiſoned by him, and theſe ridiculous words?

Le plus ſage
S'enflamme et s'engage,
Sans ſcavoir comment.

The wiſeſt of mankind,
Of a ſudden are enamoured
Without knowing why.

Notwithſtanding theſe faults, I muſt ſtill be of opinion, that our good tragedy-operas, ſuch as Atis, Armida, Theſeus, are what can give us the juſteſt idea at preſent of the theatre of Athens, becauſe the chorus, as defective as it has been rendered, and as fulſome a panegyriſt of maxims of gallantry, reſembles, however, the Grecian chorus, in that it often occupies the

e. It does not ſay what it ought to ſay; oes not deliver precepts of virtue, *et regat os et amet peccatos timentes;* but yet it muſt llowed, that the form of our tragedy-operas s to our minds the form of the Grecian tra-, in ſome reſpects. I concluded after con-ng the men of letters, who are moſt verſed in quity, that our operas are the copy and the of the tragedy of Athens; the copy, as they it a melopea, a chorus, divinities, and ma-es; and the deſtruction, as it has accuſtom-outh to be better acquainted with ſound than , to prefer the charms of the ear to thoſe ne mind, and a fine quaver to a ſublime ght; and has given the praiſe due to t, to the moſt inſipid and worſt wrote ormances, when they were ſupported by a agreeable ſongs. Notwithſtanding all theſe s, the charms that reſult from the happy tion of ſcenes and choruſſes, of dances and c, and the variety of decorations ſilence e-criticiſm. The beſt tragedy or comedy is is aſſiduouſly frequented as a moderate opera. ular, ſevere, noble beauties, are not the admired by the vulgar. If Cinna be acted or twice in a ſeaſon, the *Venetian feſtival* run a quarter of a year: an epic poem is ead, than licentious epigrams; and a ſhort ince will ſell better than de *Thou*'s hiſtory. people employ great painters, but all the d is quarrelling about Chineſe baubles, and l ornaments. We get our apartments gilt varniſhed; but we neglect noble architec-

ture; in ſhort, in every art, little emb
ments are preferred to real merit.

SECOND PART.

Of French tragedy, compared to th gedy of Greece.

True tragedy very happily appeared in I before he had an opera, which might hav thered it. An author, named Mairet, w firſt, who, in his imitation of Sophoniſba o ſino, introduced the three unities, whic had borrowed from the Greeks. Our ſc came by degrees more refined, and got the of that barbariſm and indecency, which ju in ſome meaſure, thoſe people, whoſe f of manners condemned every kind of ſpe

The actors did not appear, as was the at Athens, in buſkins, which are actually their faces were not hid under great ma which the brazen tubes rendered the voic ſtriking, and more terrible. As we co have the melopea of the Greeks, we ſatisfi ſelves with a ſimple harmonious decla ſuch as you alſo made uſe of at firſt; in our tragedies were truer imitations of We ſubſtituted hiſtory in the place of mythology. Politics, ambition, jealou pangs of love, reigned on our ſtage. A Cinna, Caeſar, Cornelia, more reſpectab ſonages than the heroes of fable, have

ſpoke on our ſcene, as they would have done in antient Rome.

I do not pretend that the French theatre has excelled the theatre of Greece in every reſpect, or ſhould make this laſt forgot. Inventors hold always the firſt place in the memory of men; but whatever reſpect we may profeſs for theſe creative geniuſes, it ſhould not hinder us from allowing, that their ſucceſſors give us much more ſatisfaction. We reſpect Homer, but we read Taſſo, where we meet with many beauties that Homer was unacquainted with. We admire Sophocles; and yet how many of our good tragic authors have paſſages in their works, which Sophocles himſelf had been proud of imitating, had theſe writers preceded him! The Greeks would have learned from our modern poets, to open the intrigue with greater art, to connect the ſcenes with ſuch imperceptible management, that it never ſuffers the ſtage to remain empty, and which accounts for the preſence or abſence of every perſonage; a management, in which the antients have been much wanting, and in which defect, Triſſino unhappily imitated them.

I maintain, for example, that Sophocles and Euripides would look on the firſt ſcene of Racine's Bajazet, as a ſchool where they might reap advantages, in ſeeing an old experienced general intimate by the different queſtions he aſks, that he meditates ſome great enterpriſe.

They would have admired how this conſpirator unfolds afterwards his deſigns, and gives an account of his conduct. This great merit of the art was not known to the inventors of the

art. This clashing of passions, this con
opposite sentiments, these spirited spee
enemies and rivals, these quarrels, these
and mutual complaints; these interesti
putes, where every thing is said that sh
said; these situations that are so well m
and brought about, would have amazed
they would not like, perhaps, in the Pha
Racine, that Hypolitus should be so coldl
rous of Aricia, and that his governor
give him lessons of gallantry; but they
certainly have admired the despair of Ph
on finding out her rival, which is much s
to the satire on learned women, that is sp
so long by Hypolitus in Euripides; and w
that occasion, in fact, becomes a paltry
nage of comedy. Above all, the Greeks
have been surprised at the number of sublin
sages that are to be found every where
modern performances.

What an effect the following answer
have produced on their minds! A father
plaining of his son's cowardice, is asked th
lowing question, by way of apology:

What could he do, my lord, when three oppos'd

To which he replies:

He might have died! *

And this other answer, still more pass

* See Mr. Whitehead's Roman Father, wh
this passage, is a translation from Corneille's *Ho*

and more beautiful that Hermione makes to Oreſtes, after having inſiſted on the death of Pyrrhus, whom ſhe loves, and hearing that unhappily ſhe had been but too well obeyed; ſhe then exclaims againſt Oreſtes:

What have I done? What could provoke thy madneſs
To aſſaſſinate ſo great, ſo brave a man?
Who ſet thee on?

ORESTES.

O grant me patience, Heaven!
With your own lips did you not curſe thy tyrant?
Pronounce his death, and urge me to deſtroy him?

HERMIONE.

What if tranſported by my boundleſs paſſion,
I cou'd not bear to ſee him wed another,
Were you to obey a jealous woman's phrenzy?

The Greeks have other beauties; but I leave it to you, my lord, if they poſſeſs any of this ſort.

I will go a ſtep farther, and ſay, that theſe men who were enamoured of liberty, and who declared ſo often, that no people can think with greatneſs, but in a republic, theſe men would learn to talk of liberty with the dignity ſuitable to it, in ſeveral of our pieces, wrote in the heart of a monarchy.

The moderns poſſeſs, alſo, much more than the Greeks, ſubjects taken from pure invention. We have had ſeveral of this ſort in the time of

Cardinal Richelieu; it was his taſte, as it was alſo that of the Spaniards: he thought it beſt to conſider firſt the characters that were deſigned to appear; afterwards to plan a plot; and then, to add the names as is done in comedy; and, as he uſed to do, when he had a mind to divert himſelf from the fatigue of government. Rotrou's Wenceſlas is entirely on this plan: the whole is fictitious. But the author had a mind to draw the character of a young man, violent in his paſſions, with a mixture of good and bad qualities, and a fond, but weak father; and, in part, he ſucceeded. The Cid and Hiraclius, taken from the Spaniards, are alſo invented ſtories: not but that there has been an emperor named Heraclius, and a Spaniſh captain named Cid; but hardly any of the adventures that are attributed to either, are founded on fact. In Zara and Alzira, (if I may be allowed to mention theſe pieces, and I mention them only to give examples that are known) all is imagined, even to the very names. I cannot conceive, after this, how father Brumoy could have aſſerted in his Greek theatre, that tragedy will not admit of fictitious ſubjects, and that ſuch a liberty was never taken at Athens. He puzzles himſelf to find out the reaſon of a fact that does not exiſt. "I think, ſays he, that the reaſon may be found in the nature of the human mind: probability only can effect it; and it is not likely that events, worthy of tragedy, ſhould be abſolutely unknown; if, therefore, a poet invents a ſubject even to the names, the ſpectator is

ſhocked, every thing ſeems incredible, and the piece miſſes its aim, for want of being probable."

In the firſt place, it is falſe, that the Greeks denied themſelves this ſpecies of tragedy. Ariſtotle expreſsly ſays, that Agathon rendered himſelf famous by it. In the ſecond place, it is falſe that ſuch tragedies do not meet with applauſe: experience is here contrary to father Brumoy. In the third place, the reaſon he aſſigns for the ill ſucceſs of ſuch tragedies, is alſo extremely falſe. It ſhews little knowlege of the human heart to imagine that fiction cannot effect it. In the fourth place, a ſubject of pure invention, and one that is real, though unknown, are exactly the ſame, with regard to the ſpectators: and as our ſcene admits ſubjects of any period or country, the ſpectator ſhould be obliged to conſult every book that is wrote, before he could determine, whether the action then repreſented, be hiſtorical or fabulous: he will hardly take that trouble, but rather ſuffers himſelf to be moved, when the ſtory is affecting: he certainly will not take it into his head to ſay, on ſeeing Polieuctes, "I never heard of Severus or Paulina, and therefore thoſe perſonages muſt make no impreſſion on me." Father Brumoy ſhould have only remarked, that pieces of this nature are much more difficult to compoſe than any others. The whole character of Phaedra was already in Euripides; her love ſpeeches may be found in Seneca, the tragic author; the entire ſcene of Auguſtus and of Cinna, is in Seneca the philoſopher; but Severus and Paulina were

taken from Corneille's own head. But though father Brumoy be miſtaken in this point, his book, however, is one of the beſt and moſt uſeful in our language; and while I am attacking a particular opinion of this author, I eſteem, in general, his labour and his taſte.

I return, and muſt ſay, that it ſhews a want of judgment and of feeling, not to be convinced how much the French ſcene is ſuperior to that of Greece, in the conduct, in the invention, and in the particular beauties that are interſperſed through our different performances.

On the other hand, we muſt be very partial and very unjuſt not to allow that gallantry, almoſt every where, counterbalances and weakens the many other advantages we poſſeſs.

We muſt own, that out of about four hundred tragedies that have been repreſented on the French ſtage, ſince it became poſſeſſed of any merit, there are not above ten or twelve which are not founded on a love-intrigue, better adapted to comedy than to tragedy. In fact, it is always the ſame play, the ſame plot, made up of a fit of jealouſy and a falling out; and unravelled by a marriage; it is a continued ſeries of coquetry; a meer comedy, in which princes are the actors, and where blood is ſometimes ſpilt for form's ſake.

Moſt of thoſe pieces are really ſo like comedy, that the players began to act and recite them, in the ſame manner they acted in what they call high or grave comedy.

They contributed, by that method, to throw tragedy into ſtill greater diſgrace; the pomp and magnificence of declamation were entirely forgot.

They piqued themſelves on repeating verſe, as they would have repeated proſe; they did not conſider that a language, above the common diſcourſe, ſhould alſo be pronounced in a manner different from a familiar tone. And if ſome actors had not happily corrected themſelves of theſe faults, in a ſhort time, tragedy among us would have been little more than a ſeries of gallant converſations, repeated with coldneſs and indifference. It is not long ago, that in our different companies of players, the principal parts in tragedy were known under the names of the lover and the miſtreſs. If a foreigner had enquired at Athens, which is your beſt actor for the lovers in Iphigenia, in Hecuba, in the Heraclides, in Oedipus, and in Electra? the meaning of ſuch a queſtion would not be underſtood. The French ſcene has cleared itſelf of this reproach by ſome tragedies, in which love is a paſſion of real rage, and highly worthy of the ſtage; and by others, in which, even the word love is not once mentioned. The pangs of love never drew as many tears from the audience's eyes, as the ties of nature. The heart is but ſlightly touched at a miſtreſs's complaints; but it is deeply affected at the mournful ſituation of a mother, who is going to loſe an only ſon.

The road to nature is more noble, and infinitely ſurer; the moſt ſtriking paſſages in Iphigenia, are thoſe where Clitemneſtra defends her daughter, not thoſe where Achilles defends his miſtreſs.

In Semiramis, a ſpectacle is attempted more

pathetic than even that in Merope. All the ſolemnity of the antient Greek theatre is introduced. It would be a hard caſe, that after our great maſters have ſurpaſſed the Greeks in ſo many parts of tragedy, we could not equal them in the dignity of the repreſentations. One of the chief obſtacles, which hinders on our ſtage any great and pathetic action, is, the number of ſpectators which are confounded on the ſcene with the actors of the play. This indecency was particularly remarkable at the firſt repreſentation of Semiramis. The principal actreſs of London, who was preſent at the firſt acting of this piece, could not get the better of her ſurpriſe. She was at a loſs to conceive, how people could be ſuch enemies to their own pleaſures, to ſpoil a ſpectacle without enjoying it. This abuſe was afterwards corrected in the repreſentations of Semiramis, and it might eaſily be ſuppreſſed for ever. We muſt not imagine that an inconvenience of that kind is conſiderable; it has deprived France of ſeveral maſter-pieces, which would certainly have been ventured on the unembaraſſed ſtage, proper for action, ſuch as the other nations of Europe poſſeſs.

But this great fault is not the only one that deſerves correction. I cannot be enough ſurpriſed, nor complain too loudly of the little care that is taken in France, to render our theatres worthy of the excellent pieces that are repreſented on them; and worthy of the nation which makes them its chief delight and amuſement. Cinna, Athalia, deſerve to be performed in a better place than in a tennis-court, at one

end of which have been placed ſome decorations in the very worſt taſte; and where the ſpectators are placed, in a manner that is contrary to order or reaſon; ſome ſtanding on the very ſtage, and ſome in what they call the pit, where they are indecently crouded and preſſed, and where they ruſh againſt each other tumultouſly and in bodies, like a ſeditious multitude. Our dramatic compoſitions are performed near the northern Pole *, in play-houſes infinitely more magnificent, better contrived, and with more decency than in Paris.

How very diſtant are we from the ſkill and refined taſte that reign, eſpecially in this point, all over Italy! It is a ſhame that theſe remains of barbariſm ſhould be ſuffered to ſubſiſt in a city, renowned for politeneſs, grandeur and opulence; as well as for the great number of its inhabitants. The tenth part of what we ſpend every day in trifles, that are magnificent, but uſeleſs and fragil, would be ſufficient to raiſe public buildings of every kind, and render Paris as magnificent, as it is rich and well peopled; and make it one day equal to Rome, which is our model in ſo many reſpects. This was one of the immortal Colbert's projects. I flatter myſelf, that you will forgive this ſhort digreſſion in favour of arts, and of my country; and that, perhaps, it may inſpire, ſome time or other, the magiſtrates of that city, with a noble deſire of imitating the magiſtrates of Athens, of Rome, and of modern Italy.

* At Peterſburg.

A theatre, built according to art, ſhould be a ſpacious edifice: it ſhould repreſent part of a public ſquare, the teriſtile of a palace, the entrance to a temple. It ought to be ſo managed, that a perſonage ſeen by the audience, might be ſuppoſed unſeen by the other perſonages of the ſcene, according as it ſhould be neceſſary. It ſhould pleaſe the eye, which muſt always be firſt ſatisfied. It ought to be ſuſceptible of the moſt majeſtic pomp. All the ſpectators ſhould hear and ſee equally well in every part of the houſe. How can all this be expected on a narrow ſtage, in the midſt of a parcel of young fellows, who hardly leave room for the actors to perform their parts. And on this account, the greateſt number of our plays are nothing more than tedious converſations: all dramatic action is often loſt, or rendered ridiculous. This abuſe ſtill ſubſiſts, becauſe it was once eſtabliſhed; and, for the ſame reaſon that people ſeldom throw down their houſes, though they are conſcious that they are ill-contrived. Public abuſes are ſeldom corrected till the laſt extremity.

However when I talk of dramatic action, I mean ſome ſolemnity, ſome ceremony, ſome aſſembly; in ſhort, ſome event neceſſary to the play, and not one of thoſe vain ſhews, that are rather childiſh than pompous, thoſe reſources of a decorator, which muſt make up for the barrenneſs of the poet, and which amuſe the eyes, when the talent is wanting to ſpeak to the head or to the heart. I have been at the play in London, when the whole ceremony of the coronation of a king of England, was repreſented to

the greateſt nicety. A champion in his coat of mail enters upon the ſtage on horſeback. I have ſometimes heard foreigners ſay, *Oh the fine opera we have ſeen! above two hundred horſemen gallopped along the ſtage.* Thoſe people did not conſider, that two good lines are preferable in a play, to a regiment of cavalry. We haver at Paris a foreign comic theatre, where, not having many good pieces to repreſent, they have introduced fire-works. It is a long while ago ſince Horace, the man of all antiquity, who had the moſt taſte, laughed at theſe theatrical fopperies, which amuſe the people:

Chairs, coaches, carts, in rattling rout are roll'd,
And ſhips of mighty bulk their ſails unfold;
At laſt the model of ſome captive towns,
In ivory built, the ſplendid triumph crowns.
Sure, if Democritus were yet on earth,
The croud would more delight the laughing ſage,
Than all the farce and follies of the ſtage.

Francis.

THIRD PART.

Of SEMIRAMIS.

For the many reaſons I have had the honour to mention to you, my Lord, you ſee what a bold undertaking it was, to introduce Semiramis, aſſembling together the different orders of the ſtate, to declare her intentions to marry; to repreſent the ghoſt of Ninus riſing from his tomb to prevent inceſt, and to revenge his death; Semiramis entering into the famous mauſoleum, which ſhe herſelf had built, coming back mortal-

ly wounded by her own ſon, and jul
It was to be apprehended, that ſuch
would ſhock the audience; and in
of thoſe who frequent the playhouſe,
ed as they were, to meer elegies ar
converſations, conſpired together a
new ſpecies of tragedy. It is me
hiſtory, that formerly in a city of Gr
were premiums propoſed for thoſe w
find out new ſources of pleaſure. H
juſt the contrary. But all the efforts
made to diſcredit this new kind of dra
tragical and terrible, have been fruit
ny people ſaid, and even wrote, that
no faith now-a-days given to ſpirits
the apparition of ghoſts muſt always
in the eyes of an unprejudiced pe
antiquity believed in ſuch prodigie
ſhall we not be allowed to conform to
Our very religion has conſecrated the
dinary ſtrokes of providence; yet wil
culous in us to ſuppoſe them!

The philoſophic Romans had no beli
in the time of the emperors, but you
ddreſſes himſelf to a ghoſt in the Pha
Engliſh certainly believe as little as
mans, in the apparition of ſpirits; y
ſee every day with great delight i
gedy of Hamlet, the ghoſt of a king,
pears upon the theatre, on pretty mu
occaſion that the ghoſt of Ninus does
mis. Indeed I am far from pretend
tify the tragedy of Hamlet in every
is a groſs and barbarous compoſition, v

not be ſupported by the loweſt populace in France or Italy. Hamlet runs mad in the ſecond act, and Ophelia in the third*; he takes the father of his miſtreſs for a rat, runs him throw the body; and in deſpair, the heroine drowns herſelf. Her grave is dug upon the ſtage; the gravediggers enter into a converſation ſuitable to ſuch low wretches, and play as it were with dead men's bones. Hamlet anſwers their abominable ſtuff, with follies equally diſguſting. While this is going on, one of the actors makes the conqueſt of Poland; Hamlet, with his mother and father-in-law, drink together upon the ſtage; they ſing at table; afterwards they quarrel; and battle and death enſue; in ſhort, one would take this performance for the fruit of an imaginati-

* "Hamlet does not run mad, though if he did, King Lear has proved, what a beautiful diſtreſs might ariſe from it; he counterfeits madneſs for his own private end, but nobody ever imagined, that he thinks he is killing a rat when he ſlays Polonius. If monſieur de Voltaire will be pleaſed to recollect the paſſage, you will find that he takes him for his better, meaning the king, and that the rat is only mentioned to ſave appearances.——That Ophelia's grave is dug upon the ſtage, cannot be refuted; but that very indecorum produces ſo many fine reflections, and ſuch an excellent vein of morality, as perhaps cannot be paralleled by the ſcene Françoiſe, and is, without doubt, warmer, and more intereſting, than the frigid, unimpaſſioned declamation of a more correct writer. I cannot recollect that Hamlet ever ſhocked me with miſerable jeſts upon this occaſion; nor do I remember that any of them are ſuch honeſt bottle companions, as to carouſe and ſing merry catches on the ſtage." No 41. *Gray's-Inn Journal.*

on of a drunken ſavage. But among all theſe groſs extravagancies, which render, at preſent, the Engliſh theatre ſo abſurd and barbarous, you will find in Hamlet, by an oddity ſtill more amazing, ſeveral ſublime paſſages, worthy of the greateſt genius. It ſeems as if nature took a pleaſure in joining together in Shakeſpear's mind, every thing that was great and ſublime, together with what the dulleſt ignorance could produce, either low or deteſtable.

We muſt allow that, among the beauties that ſhine in the midſt of all theſe ſhocking inconſiſtencies, the ghoſt of Hamlet's father is one of the moſt ſtriking incidents. It has always a great effect upon the Engliſh, I ſay even upon thoſe among them who are the moſt learned, and thoroughly convinced of the great irregularity of their antient theatre. This ghoſt inſpires us with more terror at the very reading, than the apparition itſelf of Darius in the tragedy of Eſchylus, called the Perſians: And why? Becauſe in Eſchylus, Darius appears only to foretel the misfortunes of his family; but in Shakeſpear, the ghoſt of Hamlet's father comes to demand revenge; comes to reveal ſecret crimes: it is neither uſeleſs, nor aukwardly introduced; it ſerves to ſhew, that there exiſts an inviſible power, directing the world. All mankind, who have a love for juſtice at the bottom of their hearts, are naturally pleaſed, that Providence ſhould intereſt itſelf in avenging innocence. People will ſee with ſatisfaction, in every age, and in every country, that the Supreme Being employs itſelf in puniſhing the crimes of thoſe

whoſe power renders them ſuperior to the laws of man: it is a conſolation to the weak, and a curb to the wicked.

And farther; I dare aſſert, that when ſuch a prodigy is intimated in the beginning of a tragedy, when it is fully prepared, when things are ſo managed, that it is rendered neceſſary, and even impatiently expected by the audience; I ſay it then may be placed in the rank of natural events.

I am fully perſuaded, that theſe great devices are not to be made uſe of on every occaſion. *Nec deus interſit niſi dignus vindice nodus.* I certainly would not chuſe to make Diana come from heaven, as Euripides does, in the latter end of Phaedra; nor Minerva, in his Iphigenia in Taurus. I would not make Brutus's evil genius appear to him, as is found in Shakeſpear. Such liberties ſhould not be taken, but when they add to the intrigue and terror of the piece; and the intervention of theſe ſupernatural beings ſhould never ſeem to be unavoidably neceſſary. I mean that if the plot of a tragic poem be ſo perplexed, that the appearance of a prodigy becomes the only method of unravelling it, then the audience perceives the embaraſſment in which the author has put himſelf, and laughs at the poorneſs of his reſource. We are then taken up with the aukwardneſs of the writer, who extricates himſelf ſo badly, out of a difficulty which he himſelf raiſed. The illuſion is loſt, and conſequently our concern vaniſhes. *Quodcunque oſtendis mihi ſic incredulus odi.* But

I would ſuppoſe the author of a tragedy had propoſed to put us in mind, that God ſometimes puniſhes great crimes by extraordinary methods: I would ſuppoſe the piece conducted with ſo much art, that the audience expects every moment, to ſee the ghoſt of a murdered prince calling out for vengeance; and yet this apparition not indiſpenſably requiſite to clear up a puzzled intrigue: I think, in that caſe, a prodigy of this kind would have a great effect, if well brought about, in any language, time or place.

Such is the conduct of the tragedy of *Semiramis*, if you except the beauties with which I was incapable of adorning it. You may ſee from the very firſt ſcene, that the whole is to be tranſacted by ſupernatural powers; every thing is relative, from act to act, to this ſole idea. An avenging god inſpires Semiramis with remorſe, which ſhe would not have felt in the courſe of her proſperity, had not the voice of Ninus, riſing from his tomb, terrified her in the midſt of all her glory. The ſame god makes uſe of that very remorſe to bring about her puniſhment; and from thence reſults the moral of the piece, The antients had often in their works a deſign of eſtabliſhing ſome great maxim; ſo Sophocles finiſhes his Oedipus, by ſaying that a man can never be deemed happy befor his death. Here the whole inſtruction lies in one ſentence, That

There are crimes of ſo horrid a nature, that the wrath of God can never be appeaſed,

A maxim of much greater importance than that of Sophocles. But it may be aſked, what inſtruction can the generality of mankind derive from a crime ſo rare, and a puniſhment ſtill more ſo? I own the cataſtrophe of Semiramis can happen but ſeldom; but what happens every day is contained in the laſt lines of the play.

——— Learn from hence that crimes
From mankind hidden, by the gods are ſeen.

There are few families in the world, to whom theſe lines may not be applicable, one time or other. Subjects, the moſt diſtant from the general courſe of events, may thus have the trueſt relation to the manners of all mankind.

I might, particularly, apply to the tragedy of Semiramis, the moral by which Euripides finiſhes his Alceſtes, a performance, where the marvellous reigns more abundantly than in mine: "That the gods make uſe of ſurpriſing methods to bring about their eternal deſigns; that the great events which they prepare, are above the ideas of mortal men."

In fine, my lord, it is merely becauſe this work breathes the pureſt morals, and even the moſt ſevere, that I offer it to your eminence. True tragedy is the ſchool of virtue; and the only difference that ſubſiſts between a refined theatre and books of morality, is, that inſtructions in tragedy are alive, in action, intereſting,

and ſet off with the charms of an art inv
formerly to inſtruct the earth; they ſin
praiſes of heaven; and were therefore calle
language of the gods. You, who join
great art to ſo many others, will eaſily fe
the long detail I have entered into, on m
which, perhaps, had not been before cl
up; but which might be ſoon explained ſat
torily, would your eminence be pleaſed to
municate your thoughts upon antiquity, of
you have ſo profound a knowlege.

Of the CONTRAST of Merry and Affecting Sentiments, and of the CAUSE of Laughter, in COMEDY.

In the PREFACE to the COMEDY of the PRODIGAL SON.*

IT is not a little ſurpriſing that this comedy, which was acted about ten years ago, and ran thirty nights, ſhould have hitherto remained in manuſcript. As the author concealed his name, it was attributed to ſeveral perſons of diſtinguiſhed merit; but it certainly is the work of monſieur de Voltaire, though the ſtile is ſo very different from that of the Henriade, that it would be hardly poſſible to diſcover they were both written by the ſame perſon.

We offer this piece therefore in his name to the public, as the firſt comedy which has been written in verſes of ten ſyllables†; this novelty,

* The ſtyle and manner of this and ſome other introductory prefaces, offered to the public, in the name of the publiſher or bookſeller, ſufficiently ſhew, that they were written by monſieur de Voltaire.

† The French Comedies are all in verſes of twelve ſyllables, or *Alexandrians*, as they are called in France, except a very few, that are written in proſe.

may, perhaps, induce ſome other perſon to chuſe the ſame metre. It will cauſe ſome variety on the French ſtage; and he who finds out new ſources of pleaſure and entertainment, has a right to meet with a favourable reception.

If a comedy ſhould be the repreſentation of manners, this play deſerves that name. It contains that mixture of gravity and mirth, that ſucceſſion of ridiculous and pathetic events, with which the life of man is variegated. Even the ſame accidents is ſometimes productive of all theſe contraſts. How many families may we obſerve, in which the father ſcolds, the love-ſick daughter weeps, and the ſon turns both into ridicule; while the other relations variouſly partake in the ſame ſcene! What is laughed at in one apartment, draws tears from the company of the next. The ſame perſon has often laughed and cried at the ſame thing, in the ſpace of a quarter of an hour.

A very reſpectable lady, kneeling by the bedſide of one of her daughters, who was given over, and ſurrounded by the reſt of the family, uſed often to cry out, in the bitterneſs of grief; *My God, reſtore her to me, and take away all my other children!* A gentleman, who had married another of her daughters, went up to her, and pulling her by the ſleeve, *Pray, Madam,* ſays he, *do you reckon your ſons-in-law in the number?* The grave, yet droll manner, in which he pronounced theſe words, had ſuch an effect on the afflicted mother, that ſhe left the room in a fit of laughter; none of the company could refrain from doing the ſame; and the

patient, being informed of the ſtory, laughed earlier than any of the reſt. We do not mean to conclude from thence, that every comedy ſhould contain both pleaſant and affecting ſcenes: there are ſeveral very good pieces, where nothing but gaiety appears; others are entirely ſerious; ſome, where there is an excellent mixture of both; and others which melt us into tears: no ſpecies ſhould be excluded; and were I aſked, which was the beſt? I ſhould certainly anſwer, "that which is beſt treated." It would perhaps be agreeable to the taſte of this reaſoning age to examine in this place, what is that kind of pleaſantry, which makes us laugh in a comedy.

The cauſe of laughter is one of thoſe things which are better felt than underſtood. The admirable Moliere, Regnard, (who is ſometimes equal to him) and the authors of ſo many beautiful pieces which we poſſeſs in our language, were content to excite this pleaſure in us, without ever accounting for it, or imparting their ſecret to the world.

I think I have remarked that thoſe ſudden fits of laughter which are often raiſed in the courſe of a play, are generally the conſequence of ſome miſtake; Mercury taken for Soſia*; elder Wou'd-be, for young Wou'd-be†; Criſpin making a will under the name of old Geronte‡; Valerio,

* See Dryden's *Two Soſias*, taken from *Moliere*.

† Characters in the *Twin Rivals*, taken from *les Menechmes* of Regnard.

‡ Characters in the *Legataire Univerſal* of Reg-

alking to Harpagon *, of the beauties of his ſtrong-box; Pourceaugnac †, concluded to be out of his ſenſes, from the beating of his pulſe. Miſtakes and errors of this kind always excite a general laughter.

Harlequin ſeldom makes us laugh, but when he is guilty of an-overſight: and it is on this account that he has ſo deſervedly acquired the name of *Blunderer*.

There are comic ſcenes of another kind; and there are other degrees of pleaſantry which create a different delight; but I have never obſerved what we call the *hearty laugh*, either at the play-houſe, or in private company, but upon occaſions nearly ſimilar to thoſe I have mentioned. There are other ridiculous characters which pleaſe us in the repreſentation, without cauſing that unbounded mirth.

The *Gameſter* ‡ and the *Grumbler* §, though they give inexpreſſible delight, yet ſeldom cauſe that particular kind of pleaſure, which makes us *ready to burſt our ſides*.

There is the ridicule intermingled with vice, which we are extremely pleaſed to ſee expoſed; but which ſeriouſly delights us. A diſhoneſt man can never make us laugh; becauſe, towards pro-

nard, an imitation of which was attempted ſome years ago, under the name of *Will and no Will*.

* Characters in Moliere's Miſer.

† The principal character in Molier's *Squire Trelooby*.

‡ § Two of the beſt comedies in the French language; the firſt written by Monſieur Regnard, and the ſecond by monſieur Brueys.

ducing laughter, a certain portion of gaiety is requiſite; and gaiety is ever incompatible with ſentiments of contempt and indignation.

Indeed, we laugh at the repreſentation of *Tartuffe*; but then it is not his hypocriſy, but the miſtake of the good old gentleman, who takes him for a ſaint, that makes us merry. His hypocriſy once found out, we feel other impreſſions. It would be eaſy to trace back the ſources of our other ſentiments; to what excites in us gaiety, curioſity, dramatical concern, emotion, tears. It ſhould particularly be the province of dramatic authors to unfold to us thoſe ſprings, which they ſet in action. But they are more employed in moving our paſſions than examining their origin; they ſet a greater value on a ſentiment, than on a definition; and I am too much inclined to be of their opinion, to prefix a philoſophic enquiry to a theatrical performance.

I ſhall therefore content myſelf at preſent with inſiſting a little on the neceſſity we are in, of introducing ſomething new.

If we had confined the tragic ſtage to ſcenes of Roman grandeur, it would have, at laſt, been fulſome. If our heroes were always buſied in expreſſing the pangs of deſpiſed love, it would at length become inſipid.

O imitatores ſervum pecus?

The good performances we have had ſince the time of the Corneilles, the Racines, the Molieres, the Quinauts, the Lullis, the Le

Brunſ, all contain ſomething new and ori
which has preſerved them from ſinking into
vion. In ſhort, every ſpecies is good
amuſing.

Therefore, if ſuch a piece of muſic do
ſucceed, if ſuch a picture does not ple
ſuch a play is ill received, we muſt never
bute it to its being of a new kind, but
being worth nothing in its kind.

Of the Proper Provinces of Tragedy and of Comedy.

In the Preface to the Comedy of NANINE.

THIS trifle was acted in July 1748. It was not intended for the theatre of Paris, and ſtill leſs for the preſs; nor would it now be ſent into the world, had not a ſpurious and imperfect edition been publiſhed, under the name of the company of bookſellers of Paris. There are above an hundred verſes in that edition, which were not wrote by monſieur de Voltaire. We muſt take this opportunity to caution lovers of literature from giving credit to any of thoſe editions, which have not been publiſhed under the author's eye, and by his directions. They muſt give ſtill leſs credit to the multitude of fugitive pieces that come out under his name, or to thoſe verſes that are inſerted in the collections or magazines of the times, which are the ridiculous conſequence of a trifling, vain and dangerous reputation. Until a proper and correct edition of all his works could be prepared, it was thought neceſſary to give into the hands of a creditable bookſeller, the tragedy of Semiramis, to-

gether with the comedy of Nanine; and they both appeared laſt winter among the number of new theatrical performances which come out every year in Paris.

Among the very many pamphlets that are conſtantly publiſhed in that great city, there was one of ſufficient merit to diſtinguiſh it from the reſt. It is an ingenious and well wrote diſſertation of an academician of La Rochelle *, on a queſtion which ſeems to have divided the lovers of literature: I mean whether comedies of a tender, ſerious turn, can be reconciled to true taſte; or, whether they ſhould be entirely exploded by the rules of criticiſm. This gentleman is of opinion they ſhould; and condemns with a great deal of reaſon the *familiar tragedy*. Subjects of that kind really debaſe the buſkin. The true aim both of tragedy and comedy would be totally forgot; and ſuch a performance would be, rather, a mongrel ſpecies, the monſtrous offſpring of an inability to compoſe either true tragedy or comedy.

This judicious academician blames, with great good ſenſe, all romantic and improbable intrigues in thoſe comedies, where it is attempted to raiſe the pity and affecting concern of the ſpectators;

* There are few towns of note in France, Italy, or Germany, in which there are not academies, or literary ſocieties of different denominations. They ſerve as honorary recompences to thoſe who apply to the belles-lettres; many of the learned abroad are of half a dozen ſuch ſocieties. Monſieur de Voltaire mentions in ſome part of his works, that he had the honour of belonging to eighteen academies.

and which, through deriſion, have been called *whining comedies*. But I muſt beg leave to aſk this gentleman, whether ſuch romantic, improbable intrigues ought to gain admiſſion into any ſpecies of dramatic writing? Are they not always eſſential faults, and therefore to be avoided every where with care? He concludes, by ſaying, that if comedy can any way be allowed the attempt of melting the ſpectators into tears; at leaſt nothing but the paſſion of love ſhould force them from our eyes. He certainly does not mean that paſſion, as it is drawn in ſome of our good tragedies, that fatal love which is attended with rage, with cruelty and barbariſm, and followed by crimes and by remorſe. He means that, tender, ſimple, ſoothing paſſion which properly belongs to comedy.

This reflection leads me to another, which I ſubmit to the deciſion of the learned. Methinks, in France, tragedy begins to appropriate to itſelf the language of comedy. If we take notice, we ſhall find, that in many of the former kind of writing, where terror and pity ſhould be worked to the higheſt pitch of diſtreſs, love is really treated in the ſtile of comedy. Gallantry, declarations of love, coquetry, and familiarity, are, but too often, to be met with in the Greek and Roman heroes and heroines, that are repreſented on our theatres. So that, in fact, the tender genuine love we meet with in comedy is not an encroachment on the province of Melpomene; but on the contrary, Melpomene has long ſince trod our ſtage in the ſcandals of her ſiſter Thalia.

Let us caſt our eyes back on the firſt tragedies which had ſuch prodigious ſucceſs, about the time of cardinal Richelieu; the Sophoniſba of Mairet, the Mariamne of Triſtan, and many others; we ſhall find, that the paſſion of love is treated in as familiar, and ſometimes in as low a ſtile, as their heroiſm is expreſſed in bombaſt and affectation. This is probably the reaſon why our nation did not, at that time, poſſeſs one tolerable comedy. The tragic muſe had uſurped all its rights Moliere ſeldom gave the lovers he introduces on the ſcene, a lively or ſtriking paſſion, becauſe he was conſcious that the tragic writers had been before-hand with him.

Since the Sophoniſba of Mairet, which was the firſt play that preſerved any kind of regularity; the declarations of love by heroes, the artful coquettiſh anſwers of princeſſes, and the gallant lively deſcriptions of love, were looked upon as things eſſential to the tragic ſtage.

The great Corneille, who brought to ſuch perfection the true eloquence of poetry, whoſe lovers ſpeak a language ſo feeling, and yet ſo noble, has however inſerted in his tragedies ſeveral ſcenes that Boileau thought worthier of Terence, than of the rival and conqueror of Euripides.

I might quote above three hundred of his verſes, which would anſwer this deſcription. Not, that ſimplicity, which has its charms, and ingenioufneſs which comes ſo near the true ſublime, are not neceſſary, to prepare for, or connect together, the more pathetic paſſages of the drama. But if theſe ſimple ingenuous touch-

es are uſeful in tragedy, with how much greater reaſon do they belong to noble comedy! this is the point where tragedy and comedy meet. It is here alone that their limits are confounded together. They afterwards return, each to its natural ſphere. The one aſſumes the comic tone; the other the ſublime.

Comedy may therefore be allowed to repreſent the paſſions in their greateſt vehemence and force; it may raiſe our anger, or move our pity, provided it afterwards ſerves to furniſh matter of mirth and laughter to people of taſte and refinement. If it wants the comic ſtroke, if it be really and entirely *whining*; it muſt then, in fact, become diſagreeable and abſurd.

I confeſs it is rare to make ſpectators paſs inſenſibly from compaſſion to gaiety. But this tranſition, difficult as it is to effect in a comedy, is not the leſs natural to mankind. I have remarked elſewhere, that nothing is ſo common as unfortunate events, which furniſh circumſtances of tranſitory mirth. Such is the mind of man. Homer repreſents even the gods laughing at the aukward manners of Vulcan, at the very time they are aſſembled to determine the fate of the world.

Hector ſmiles at the fright of his infant ſon Aſtyanax, at the ſame time that Andromache is drowned in tears. It often happens that in the very horror of battle, of fire, or any other of theſe misfortunes which attend mankind, an ingenious ſaying, a pleaſant remark will excite our mirth in the midſt of deſolation and pity. A French regiment at the battle of Spire, had or-

much more reaſon ſhould a ſcene of mirt
comedy ſucceed to affecting ſentiments!
we not moved for Alcmena, and yet do
Soſia make us laugh? It is a vain and fr
attempt to diſpute againſt experience.

Of the EXCELLENCIES of the GREEK, and DEFECTS of the FRENCH DRAMA.

In a LETTER to her Serene Highneſs the Ducheſs of MAINE.

MADAM,

YOU ſaw the concluſion of that admirable century, to whoſe glory you contributed ſo much, by your taſte and your example; that age which is the model of ours in many reſpects, and in others a reproach, as it will be to all future ages. It was in thoſe celebrated days, that the Condes, your anceſtors, covered with victorious laurels, cultivated and encouraged the arts; that a Boſſuet immortalized heroes and inſtructed kings; that a Fenelon, the ſecond man in eloquence *, but the firſt in the art of rendering virtue amiable, taught with ſuch charms and grace, the beauty of juſtice and humanity; that the Racines, the Boileaus preſided in the belles lettres, Lulli in muſic, and Le Brun in painting. All theſe arts were well received, particularly in your palace, where I ſhall

* Boſſuet's funeral orations made him looked upon as the moſt eloquent of all the French writers.

always remember, that in my younger days, I ſometimes had the happineſs of hearing the celebrated monſieur de Malezieu. He was a man in whom profound erudition had not ſtifled the moſt lively genius, and who ſucceeded ſo very happily in the education of the duke of Burgundy, as well as in that of your grace and in the duke of Maine's, becauſe he was ſo very much aſſiſted by nature. Sometimes he would take a Sophocles, or an Euripides before your ſerene highneſs, and tranſlate at once one of their tragedies into French. The admiration and enthuſiaſm theſe great authors inſpired him with, furniſhed him expreſſions which came as near to the ſtrong and harmonious energy of the Greeks, as it was poſſible in a language hardly recovered from barbariſm; and which, poliſhed as it is by ſo many writers of genius, is yet deficient in copiouſneſs, preciſion, and force. It is well known, that it is impoſſible to tranſmit into any modern language the intire value of the Grecian expreſſions; they deſcribe in one word what requires ſeveral in any other tongue. A ſingle term is ſufficient to expreſs in Greek, a mountain covered with trees loaded with leaves; another, a god who ſhoots his darts at a great diſtance; and a third, the ſummits of rocks often ſtruck by thunder-bolts. Not only, one word was enough to convey a ſeries of ideas that filled the mind; but each term had its peculiar harmony, and charmed the ear at the ſame time that it diſplayed ſublime deſcriptions to the imagination. And this is the reaſon, why moſt

tranſlations from Greek poets, are flimſy, dry, and unintereſting. It is like an attempt to imitate porphyrian marble with brick or pebbles. And yet, monſieur Malezieu, by efforts that a ſudden enthuſiaſm always drew from him, and by the eloquence of action, ſeemed to make up in ſome meaſure, for the poorneſs of our language; and to breathe, in his declamation, the very ſpirit of the great writers of Athens. Give me leave, madam, to mention here his thoughts relative to that ingenious, delicate, and inventive nation, which taught every thing to its conquerors, the Romans; and long after its deſtruction, and that of the Roman empire, ſtill ſerved to draw modern Europe from the groſs ignorance in which it had been plunged for ſo many centuries.

He was better acquainted with Athens, than ſeveral travellers are now-a-days with Rome, after having ſpent ſome time in that city. The prodigious number of ſtatues, by the greateſt maſters; thoſe columns which adorned the public market-places; theſe monuments of genius and of grandeur; that immenſe and ſumptuous theatre, ſituated between the town and the citadel, where the works of Sophocles and Euripides were acted before ſuch men as Pericles and Socrates, and where young fellows were not allowed to aſſiſt in a confuſed tumultuous manner; in a word, every thing the Athenians did in favour of the fine arts, was preſent to his mind. He was far from agreeing with ſome people, whoſe ridiculous auſterity and falſe politics incline them to condemn the Athenians for the

the great attention they paid to, and the vaſt expences they were at in, their public diverſions. Thoſe people do not conſider, it ſeems, that this very magnificence contributed to the enriching of Athens, by attracting conſtantly ſuch numbers of foreigners, who came to admire its ſplendor, and to learn precepts of virtue and of eloquence.

You prevailed, madam, on that almoſt univerſal genius to tranſlate into French the Iphigenia in Tauris of Euripides, which he performed with great fidelity, elegance, and force. It was acted in an entertainment, which he had the honour to give your ſerene highneſs, and which was worthy of the perſon that received it, and of him who gave it. You were pleaſed to repreſent the part of Iphigenia. I was preſent at this ſpectacle; I was not then accuſtomed to our French theatre; it never came into my head, that gallantry could find a place in that tragic ſubject; I entirely gave in to the manners and cuſtoms of Greece, and that, with the leſs difficulty, as I was little acquainted with any others; I admired antiquity in all its noble plainneſs and ſimplicity. This was what firſt made me think of writing the tragedy of Oedipus, without having even read that of Corneille on the ſame ſubject. I began by endeavouring to tranſlate the famous ſcene in Sophocles, which contains the mutual confidence between Oedipus and Jocaſta. I read it to ſome of my acquaintance, who frequented the play-houſes, and to ſeveral actors. They all aſſured me, that this ſcene would never take on the French ſtage. They adviſed

me to read Corneille, who took care to avoid it; and told me, that if I did not introduce an amorous intrigue in my Oedipus, as Corneille had done in his, the players could not poſſibly undertake to repreſent it. Upon this I peruſed Corneille's Oedipus, which though not put upon a level with Cinna or Polyeuctes, yet was held in great eſteem. I muſt own, I was ſhocked on the reading it; and yet was I obliged to yield to example and to prejudice. I introduced, in the midſt of the terror which this maſter-piece of antiquity naturally inſpires, not, indeed, an actual intrigue, for that was too revolting for me to conſent to it, but at leaſt the remembrance of an extinguiſhed paſſion.

Your ſerene highneſs may remember, that I had the honour to read before you my new tragedy. The ſcene from Sophocles was not certainly condemned at your tribunal. But you and cardinal Polignac and monſieur de Malezieu, and thoſe who compoſed your court, all blamed me with very great reaſon, for having even pronounced the word *Love*, in a work which Sophocles had rendered admirable, without the help of any ſuch foreign ornament; and that part of my tragedy which determined the actors to receive it, was preciſely what YOU moſt condemned.

The players repreſented Oedipus with regret, and without any hopes of ſucceſs; but the public was of your opinion. What was in the manner of Sophocles, was univerſally applauded; while any thing that looked like love, was condemned by every body of taſte or judgment.

And indeed, madam, it muſt ſeem ſtrange to find gallantry mixed with the groans of people afflicted with the plague, and with the horror occaſioned by parricide and inceſt! Nor can there be a greater example of the ridicule of our theatre, and of the force of cuſtom, than Corneille, onthe one hand, who makes Theſeus ſpeak in the following manner;

Tho' horrid havock here the raging plague caſts round,
Yet to lovers, abſence is a thing more dreadful;

And I, on the other, who, ſixty years afterwards, introduce the old Jocaſta talking of an antiquated amour; all this to pleaſe the falſeſt and moſt inſipid taſte that ever corrupted literature.

That Phaedra *, whoſe character is the moſt theatrical that ever was repreſented and almoſt the only amorous one the antients ever drew, ſhould diſplay the vehemence and fury of this fatal paſſion; that Roxana †, in the indolence of the ſeraglio, ſhould abandon herſelf to love and jealouſy; that Ariana ‡ ſhould complain to heaven and earth of being ſlighted by her lover; that Oſman § ſhould kill the very object he adores; all theſe ſubjects are truly tragical. When love is furious, criminal, unhappy; when followed by repentance and remorſe, the pity it excites is really noble. There is no medium: love muſt either reign with ſovereign ſway, or

* † Characters in two of Racine's plays.
‡ A Character in one of Corneille's plays.
§ See Zara, tranſlated from the French of monſieur de Voltaire, by Aaron Hill, Eſq.

be totally left out. It cannot be made uſe of as a ſecondary paſſion. That Nero * ſhould hide himſelf, in order to hear the converſation between his miſtreſs and his rival; that old Mithridates † ſhould put a comic ſtratagem in practice, to find out the inclinations of a lady, who is beloved both by him and his two ſons; that Maximus ‡ in the play of Cinna §, which, in other reſpects, is ſo full of true manly beauties, ſhould baſely diſcover an important conſpiracy, from no other motive than to pleaſe a woman he is fooliſhly fond of, notwithſtanding the love he knows ſhe bears for Cinna, and as a reaſon for betraying his companions, ſhould ſay;

> That tender paſſion, love, makes all things lawful;
> An ardent lover knows no ties of friendſhip;

That an old Sertorius ſhould fall in love with a certain Viriata, and ſhould be ſlain by Perpenna, who is alſo ſmitten with the charms of this Spaniſh fair one: all this, I muſt ſay, is low and puerile; and ſuch puerilities ought to place us in a rank vaſtly inferior to the Athenians, had not our great maſters made up for theſe faults peculiar to our nation, by ſhining excellencies and ſublime beauties, which they owed entirely to their own genius.

It appears very extraordinary to me, that the great tragic writers of Athens ſhould have ſo often handled ſubjects, where the moſt affecting ſtrokes

* † Characters in two of Racine's tragedies.
‡ § Characters in two of Corneille's

of nature are ſtrongly and variouſly diſplayed, ſuch as an Electra, an Iphigenia, a Merope, or an Alcmeon; and that our great modern poets ſhould neglect ſuch ſublime ſubjects, and confine themſelves almoſt totally to thoſe of love, which is oftener fit to be treated in comedy than in tragedy. Some imagined, they could render this paſſion noble, by blending it with politics; but love is cold and awakening to the audience, when its effects are not rapid, and its meaſures regardleſs of the fatal conſequences that may attend the purſuit; and on the other hand, when a deſire of power does not grow into a boundleſs ambition, it becomes ſtill more cold and unintereſting. Political diſcourſes are proper in Polybius, or in Machiavel; gallantry is ſuited to comedy and romances; but neither is worthy of the pathos and grandeur which ſhould conſtantly reign in tragedy.

A taſte for gallantry prevailed ſo far in tragedy, that a great Princeſs, whoſe wit and rank rendered, in ſome meaſure, excuſable, for thinking every body of her opinion, imagined, that the departure of Titus and Berenice was a tragical ſubject; and deſired it ſhould be treated by the two great maſters of the dramatic art. Neither of them ever wrote a play, in which love did not act a principal, or a ſecondary part: but one * never addreſſed the heart, except in the ſcenes of Cid, which he took from the Spaniſh; the other †, was eloquent on every occaſion, and

* The elder Corneille.

† Racine.

happy in the knowlege of that charming art, which draws from the moſt trivial ſituation, the moſt delicate ſentiments. The firſt made of *Titus* and *Berenice*, one of the worſt performances we have on the French ſtage; while the other found the means of intereſting the audience through the whole career of five acts: "*I love you, and yet I muſt depart.*" In fact, it was nothing more than a paſtoral between an emperor, a king, and a queen; and a paſtoral infinitely leſs tragical than the intereſting ſcenes of the *Paſtor fido*. This ſucceſs perſuaded the world that love ſhould be the foundation of all our tragedies.

It was a conſiderable time after, before this eloquent poet perceived he was capable of doing greater things; and repented his having weakened the tragic ſcene with ſo many declarations of love, ſo many ſentiments of jealouſy and of coquetry, worthier, as I have already preſumed to aſſert, of Menander, than of Sophocles and Euripides. He then compoſed *Athalia*, his maſterpiece; but though he was undeceived himſelf, the public yet remained in error. They could not conceive how a woman, a child, and a prieſt, could form an intereſting tragedy. The performance that comes neareſt to perfection of any that was ever publiſhed, lay long in contempt and oblivion; and its illuſtrious author had, at his death, the regret of not ſeeing juſtice done to his beſt work, by the enlightened, but corrupted age he had lived in.

It is certain, that had this great man continued to cultivate a talent, to which he was indebt-

ed for his fortune and reputation, and which he ſhould not have abandoned *; he would not have diſgraced the great ſubjects of antiquity, with inſipid intrigues. He began the tragedy of *Iphigenia in Taurus*, and no ſcenes of gallantry entered into his plan †. He never would have given an amour to Agamemnon, Oreſtes, Electra, Telephontes, or Ajax; but he unhappily laid aſide all thoughts of the theatre, before he had corrected it. Thoſe who followed him, have imitated and ſurpaſſed the faults he had been guilty of, without attaining to any of his excellencies. The maxims of gallantry, which were peculiar to the opera of Quinaut, now found admitance on the tragic ſcene: they reſembled, in ſome meaſure, the romances of mademoiſelle Scuderi, who deſcribed the citizens of Paris under the names of antient heroes.

To confirm the nation in this wretched taſte, which makes us ridiculous in the eyes of all ſenſible foreigners, it unluckily happened that monſieur de Longepierre, who was very zealous for antiquity, but who was not ſufficiently acquainted with our theatre, nor careful enough in his verſification, brought his Electra on the ſtage.

It muſt be allowed, his play was wrote in the taſte of the antients. No cold and pitiful intrigue diſgraced this terrible ſubject. The piece

* Monſieur *Racine*, in his latter years, gave himſelf up entirely to devotion, and diſcontinued writing plays, through a ſcruple of conſcience.

† This ſubject has been handled with great ſucceſs two or three years ago, by monſieur *Guymond de la Touche*.

was ſimple and void of epiſodes. Theſe were the merits which procured it the patronage of ſo many perſons of diſtinction, who were in hopes that this precious ſimplicity, which rendered famous the great writers of Athens, would at laſt meet with a favourable reception in Paris, where it had been ſo long neglected.

You, madam, as well as her ſerene highneſs, the princeſs of Conti, were at the head of thoſe, who flattered themſelves with theſe hopes: but unhappily, the faults of the French compoſition got the better of the beauties borrowed from the Greek; and on the repreſentation, you confeſſed it was a ſtatue of Praxiteles disfigured by a modern workman. You had the courage to abandon what was not worthy of being ſupported; conſcious, that patronage granted to bad performances, was as great an obſtruction to the progreſs of literature, as the neglect of good ones. But the fall of Electra proved, at the ſame time, extremely fatal to the partiſans of antiquity. The public, very wrongly, argued from the defects of the copy, againſt the merit of the original; and completely to corrupt the taſte of the nation, it was concluded, that it was impoſſible to ſupport, without an intrigue of gallantry, and romantic incidents, theſe ſubjects, which the antients never diſgraced with ſuch epiſodes. It was pretended, that we might admire the Greeks in the cloſet, but that we could never expect to imitate them on the theatre, without being condemned by our cotemporaries. Strange contradiction! for if the reading of theſe works can pleaſe, why not the repreſentation?

I do not mean that we ſhould imitate the antients where they are defective and weak. It is very probable, that the faults they have been guilty of, were remarked in their own times. I am convinced, madam, that the good judges in Athens condemned, as you have done, ſome repetitions, and ſome declamations, that are to be found in the Electra of Sophocles. They might alſo have taken notice, that he does not ſearch deep enough into the human heart. Beſides, there are many beauties peculiar, not only to the Grecian tongue, but alſo to the manners, the climate, the times, which would be ridiculous to attempt tranſplanting into our ſoil. I have not, therefore, copied Sophocles's Electra, but I have taken from it as much as the circumſtances would permit; I have endeavoured to extract its ſpirit and ſubſtance. The feſtival celebrated by Egiſtus and Clitemneſtra, and which are called the feaſts of Agamemnon; the arrival of Oreſtes and Palides; the urn which is ſuppoſed to contain the aſhes of Oreſtes; Agamemnon's ring; the character of Electra; that of Iphiſa, which is exactly the Criſothemes of Sophocles; and eſpecially, the remorſe of Clitemneſtra, are all taken from the Greek tragedy; for when the perſon, who relates to Clitemneſtra, an account of the pretended death of Oreſtes, and afterwards ſays to her:

How can the death of ſuch a ſon afflict you?

Clitemneſtra anſwers:

I am a mother, Sir, and therefore muſt be griev'd;
A mother, tho' cruelly offended, yet can feel
No hatred for her children.

She afterwards ſtrives to clear herſelf of the murder of Agamemnon; ſhe partake in her daughter's grief; and Euripides puſhed, ſtill farther than Sophocles, the tears and affliction of Clitemneſtra. All this was received and applauded by the Athenians, who had the moſt judgment, and, at the ſame time, the moſt tender feelings of any people in the univerſe; and theſe ſcenes were alſo felt by every good judge in our nation. Nothing in fact is ſo natural, than to ſee a woman who is guilty towards her huſband, and tender towards her children, give room to the impreſſions of pity in her proud and ſavage heart; who aſſumes her former character of cruelty and hard-heartedneſs, when upbraided with too much violence and harſhneſs; and who is again appeaſed by ſubmiſſion and by tears. The out-lines of this character were drawn by Sophocles and by Euripides; I have endeavoured to fill them up. It belongs only to ignorance and preſumption its natural offspring, to pretend, that there is nothing worthy imitation in the antients. There is not a beauty in our modern performances, of which we cannot perceive ſome traces in the writers of antiquity.

I laid it down to myſelf as a law, above all things not to ſwerve from the ſimplicity which is ſo ſtrongly recommended by the Greeks, and ſo difficult to maintain; it was the true characteriſtic of invention and of genius; it was eſ-

fential to the theatre; a new perſonage introduced in Oedipus or Electra, whoſe part is important enough to divert the attention of the audience, is a monſter in the eyes of any perſon acquainted with nature, and with the antients, who were the firſt deſcribers of nature. Art and genius conſiſt in finding every thing in the ſubject. But how is it poſſible to imitate that pomp and truly tragical magnificence of the lines of Sophocles, that elegance, that purity of diction, without which a performance, not defective in other reſpects, would, notwithſtanding, be a bad performance!

At leaſt I have given my countrymen the model of a tragedy without love, without confidants, without epiſodes. The ſmall number of partiſans of true taſte have expreſſed to me ſome ſatisfaction for this attempt; and as for the reſt, they are undeceived but by degrees, when the rage of party, the injuſtice of perſecution, and the clouds of ignorance are diſperſed. It is your province, madam, to preſerve the few ſparkles which remain among us of that precious light the antients tranſmitted to us. We owe to them every thing; no art has been invented by us; all have been tranſplanted: but the earth which bears theſe foreign fruits, grows weary and exhauſted; and our former barbariſm aided by the frivoloufneſs of the preſent age, would ſoon introduce itſelf, notwithſtanding the improvements we have received; the diſciples of Athens and of Rome would become Goths and Vandals, ſunk in the luxury of Sibarites; without the encouragement and diſcerning protection

f perſons of your rank. When nature has granted ıem a genius, they encourage our nation, which ; better adapted for imitation than for invention, nd which always looks for inſtructions and exmple, in the family of its ſovereigns *. All I viſh for, madam, is, that ſome genius may aiſe, who may finiſh what I have begun ; who nay recover the theatre from its preſent affectaion and effeminacy; who may render it reſpectable to perſons of the moſt ſtrict auſterity; and who may make it worthy of the flouriſhing days of Athens, and of the ſmall number of maſterpieces our nation poſſeſſes; and worthy, in fine, of the ſuffrage of ſuch a mind as yours, and minds happy enough to reſemble yours.

* The lady this letter was addreſſed to, was of the royal family of France.

Of the CHINESE TRAGEDIES.

In the DEDICATION of the ORPHAN of CHINA, to his Grace the Duke of RICHELIEU.

I Wiſh, my lord, I could erect to you a marble ſtatue like the Genoeſe*, inſtead of a Chineſe mandarin, which is all that I have to offer you. Indeed this performance does not ſeem at all calculated for you. It makes no mention of an hero, who has won univerſal approbation by the charms of his wit; who ſaved a republic that was on the brink of deſtruction†; and who found out the means of conquering a formidable column of Engliſhmen with four canons ‡. No body can be better perſuaded than

* † The duke of Richelieu contributed conſiderably towards ſaving the republic of Genoa laſt war, from the attempt and deſign of the Germans; in gratitude of which his ſtatue has been erected by the Genoeſe.

‡ It is ſuppoſed that the principal cauſe of the retreat of the glorious column of Engliſh infantry in the battle of Fontenoy, was owing to the havock cauſed among them by a few canon placed directly oppoſite to the column, by the direction of this nobleman.

I am, of the ſmallneſs of my preſent; but ſome indulgence may be granted to an attachment of forty years continuance. It may poſſibly be inſinuated, that, retired as I am, at the foot of the Alps, and in view of eternal ſnow, where I ſhould lead the life of a philoſopher, I cannot however reſiſt the vanity of telling the world, that the moſt valuable perſonages on the borders of the river Seine have never forgot me; it is certain however, that I only conſulted the ſentiments of my heart; they alone are the guides of my conduct, and have always influenced my words and actions. The heart is ſometimes miſtaken; but not after ſo long a trial. Permit me, therefore, if this tragedy ſhould happen to remain ſometime after its author, to acquaint poſterity, that as your uncle, cardinal Richelieu introduced the fine arts into France, and encouraged them in their infancy, ſo you have ſupported them in their decline.

The firſt time I thought of writing this play, was on reading the *Orphan of Tchao*, a Chineſe tragedy, tranſlated by father *Bremare*, and inſerted in the collection publiſhed by father *Du Halde*. This Chineſe drama was compoſed in the fourteenth century, under the very dynaſty of Gengis-Kan. This is an additional proof that the Tartar conquerors cauſed no change in the manners of the nation they ſubdued. They protected all the arts that were eſtabliſhed in China, and adopted all its laws.

This is a ſtriking example of the natural ſuperiority of reaſon and genius, over blind and barbarous force; and the Tartars have twice

furniſhed this example. For when they overran this great empire a ſecond time, in the beginning of the laſt century, they ſubmitted a ſecond time to the wiſdom of the vanquiſhed; and both became one people, governed by the moſt antient laws in the univerſe: an event worthy of admiration; and to mark this event was the chief aim I propoſed in writing the following tragedy. The Chineſe tragedy, which bears the name of the *Orphan*, is choſen from an immenſe collection of theatrical pieces of that nation. The Chineſe have cultivated, above three thouſand years, this art, invented a little later by the Greeks, of drawing living deſcriptions of the actions of men, and of eſtabliſhing ſchools of morality, where virtue is taught in action and dialogue. So that dramatic poetry has been long held in eſteem, only in the vaſt dominion of China, ſeparated from, and unknown to, the reſt of the world, and in the ſingle city of Athens. Rome did not cultivate this branch of literature for four hundred years afterwards. No trace of it is to be found either among the Perſians or Indians, who generally are conſidered as people of genius and invention. Aſia has always been contented with the fables of Pilpay and of Locman, which include an entire ſyſtem of morality, and inſtruct by allegory every age and every nation. It ſhould ſeem, that having put diſcourſes into the mouths of animals, there was but another ſtep to take, in order to introduce human perſonages as diſcourſing to each other; and thus give riſe to the dramatic art; and yet theſe ingenious nations never

thought of advancing this other ſtep. From thence we may infer, that the Greeks, Romans and Chineſe, were the only nations among the antients who underſtood the true ſpirit of ſociety. Nothing, in fact, renders men more ſocial, ſoftens more their manners, or improves their reaſon better, than that they ſhould thus aſſemble together to enjoy the pure and refined pleaſures of the mind. And thus Peter the great had hardly recovered Ruſſia from barbariſm, and built Peterſburgh, when theatres were eſtabliſhed there. The more Germany has improved, the readier it has been to adopt our ſpectacles *. The few parts, where they were not received in the laſt age, were not looked upon as civilized countries.

The *Orphan of Tchao* is a valuable monument, that inſtructs us better in the ſpirit of China, than all the accounts that have, or will be, given of that vaſt empire. This piece, it muſt be owned, is quite barbarous in compariſon to the good performances of the preſent times; but it is a maſter-piece if you compare it to our European compoſitions of the fourteenth century.

We muſt alſo remark, that this piece is wrote in the language of the mandarins, which has not undergone the leaſt change; and that we can hardly underſtand the language that was ſpoken in France, under the reign of Lewis the twelfth

* There are companies of French players in moſt great towns of Germany, where they are invited and encouraged by the Electors and other German princes.

and Charles the eighth. The *Orphan of Tchao* may be compared to the Engliſh and Spaniſh tragedies of the ſeventeenth century, which continue ſtill to pleaſe, a-croſs the channel, and beyond the Pyraenean mountains. The action of the Chineſe play includ esfiveand twenty years, as in the monſtrous farces of Shakeſpear and Lopez de Vega which have obtained the name of tragedies. It contains a heap of incredible events. The enemy of the houſe of Tchao is reſolved to deſtroy its chief, by the means of a great maſtiff, which we muſt ſuppoſe is indued with an inſtinct of diſcovering the guilty, as our *James Aimar* is ſaid to have diſtinguiſhed thieves by the touch of his wand. This enemy of the Tchao family, pretending afterwards an order from the emperor, ſends to Tchao a cord, a ponyard, and a cup of poiſon. Tchao ſings according to the eſtabliſhed cuſtom, and then ſtabs himſelf, in virtue of that unlimitted ſubmiſſion, which every inhabitant of the earth owes, by divine right, to the emperor of China. The perſecutor puts to death three hundred perſons of the houſe of Tchao. The only ſurviving widow is delivered of the orphan, which is the ſubject of this play. This infant is hid from the fury of him who deſtroyed the whole family; and who, reſolved to put to death the only one that now remained, gave orders that all the children of the neighbouring villages ſhould be maſſacred, in order that the orphan might be included in the general ſlaughter. One would imagine that it was the Arabian nights entertainments, turned into dialogue and action; but notwithſtanding

the incredibility of the ſtory, the intrigue is intereſting; and notwithſtanding the multitude of events, there reigns the greateſt perſpicuity through the whole: theſe are two great points in every age or nation, and form a ſpecies of merit, which is not to be found in ſeveral of our modern performances. The Chineſe play is indeed deſtitute of all other beauties; unity of time or action, diſplay of ſentiment, deſcription of manners, eloquence, reaſon, paſſion, all is wanting; and, yet it is much ſuperior to any thing of the kind which was publiſhed in Europe at the ſame time.

How comes it that the Chineſe, who in the fourteenth century, and long before, wrote better dramatic poems than all the Europeans, ſhould remain to this day in the dawning of the art; and that our nation ſhould produce about a dozen pieces, which if they are not perfect, are, at leaſt, much ſuperior to any thing the reſt of the world has ever attempted? The knowlege of the Chineſe has never gone beyond the elements of poetry, of eloquence, of phyſics, of aſtronomy, of painting, though theſe ſeveral arts were known in China long before they had any footing in Europe. It has been the fate of that nation to begin every thing before the reſt of the world, and afterwards to make no progreſs. They are like the antient Egyptians, who, having firſt taught the Greeks, became afterwards even incapable of being their diſciples.

The Chineſe, (in whoſe country many Europeans have travelled, notwithſtanding the dangers and difficulties that attend ſuch voyages;)

from whom we could hardly obtain leave to convey to them our riches and our knowlege*; are not conſcious how much ſuperior we are to them: they are not far enough advanced, to have a deſire of imitating us. We have drawn from their hiſtory, ſubjects for our tragedies; and they are ignorant to this day, that Europe has produced hiſtorians.

The celebrated abbe Metaſtaſio has choſen pretty much the ſame ſubject for one of his dramatic poems that I have done; that is to ſay, an orphan, preſerved from the general maſſacre of his family; and he has taken it from an event which paſſed under a dynaſty that reigned about nine hundred years before the chriſtian aera.

The Chineſe tragedy of the orphan of *Tchao*, is quite a different ſubject. I have choſen one equally diſtant from both, and which is alike only in name. I fixed upon the famous epoch of Gengis-Kan, in order to paint the manners of the Tartars and of the Chineſe. The moſt intereſting adventures are related to no ſort of purpoſe, if they do not convey, at the ſame time, a deſcription of manners. Aud even this is but a frivolous amuſement, if that deſcription does not contribute to inſpire us with ſentiments of virtue. I dare aſſert, that, from the *Henriade* to *Zara*, and down to this Chineſe piece, ſuch was always the aim I propoſed, and the principle that conducted me. In the hiſtory of the age of

* There are always jeſuits at the court of the emperor of China, whoſe employment conſiſts in teaching the mathematical ſciences of Europe.

Lewis the fourteenth, I have celebrated my king and country, without flattering either. In theſe endeavours have I ſpent above forty years. But here is the advice of a Chineſe philoſopher, whoſe writings are tranſlated into Spaniſh, by the famous *Navarette*.

" If you write a book, ſhew it only to your friends. Dread the public and your brother authors. They will embitter your expreſſions, miſrepreſent your meaning, and impute to you, what you never thought of. Calumny, which has an hundred mouths, will open them againſt you; and truth, which is ſilent, will remain with you. The celebrated *Ming* was accuſed of entertaining diſreſpectful ideas of *Tien* and *Li*, and of being diſaffected to the emperor *Vang*. When the executioners went to ſeize the old man, they found him compoſing a panegyric upon *Vang*, and an hymn to *Tien* and *Li*." etc.

THE END.

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